

Kant's View of Freedom Studies

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Abstract: “Freedom” is the most core concept of Kant’s philosophy. There are two meanings in Kant’s philosophy: prior freedom and freedom of practice. This article explains Kant’s view of freedom from these two views of freedom, and discusses the relationship between freedom and practical freedom, namely moral freedom, freedom and self-discipline, and the significance of Kant’s freedom.

Keywords: Freedom; Prior freedom; Freedom of practice; Moral law; Self-discipline

“Freedom” is the most core concept of Kant’s philosophy. In Kant, in the Critique of Pure Reason, he introduced the concept of “prior freedom” in which freedom is the negative meaning of freedom. And the criticism of Practical Reason shows the positive significance of freedom. This paper mainly understands Kant’s view of freedom through practical rational criticism. Simply put, freedom has two meanings in Kant’s philosophy: freedom a priori and freedom of practice. Freedom in Kant’s philosophy first starts from its “negative meaning”, namely “transcendental freedom”. He provides the premise for ethics with the negative freedom, and then shows the positive meaning of freedom, namely the freedom of practice, through the mutual verification of moral laws and freedom.

First, a priori freedom

In the dialectical part of The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant proposed the contradiction of freedom and necessity, which is the key to Kant’s discovery of freedom. Freedom belongs to the ontology world and necessarily to the phenomenal world; the law of natural causality as an intellectual law applies to and only to all possible empirical phenomena, while the idea of natural causality as a prior applies to the object. A priori freedom means that in causality, the cause itself is not subordinate to another cause according to the law of natural causality, that is, it is the force that actively begins a state and is absolutely first. In general terms, it is the cause of no reason, and the absolute beginning, and the absolute cause, of all the phenomena subject to the law of natural cause and effect. The existence of freedom also lies in the dichotomy between phenomenon and nature, because assuming that something is not different from itself, then freedom is impossible. The reason why things are so visible to us must be outside the expression series and not in the expression. The causal effect of such a “rational cause” is shown in the series as being subject to the natural law of causality, while it itself as the cause is the free^[1].

Second, the freedom of practice

(1) Freedom and moral laws

In the criticism of Practical Reason, Kant illustrates the similarities of pure rational criticism and practical reason critical research methods: the structure of the two, the opposite order, the key lies in the different research fields, so that theoretical rationality can mix experience and practical rationality depends on a highest practical principle, it “is considered by every natural human reason, does not rely on any sensibility and conditions to recognize the highest law that their will obey”. Freedom of practice means that the will will never depend on anything other than moral law. Kant has repeatedly stressed that the practice of freedom can not be explained by perceptual experience, also can not regard freedom as a psychological characteristics, but regard it as “belong to the perceptual world of a cause of prior attribute”, if freedom as experience or psychological characteristics, then the doping experience freedom can not as the basis of pure moral law, thus a real freedom of super perceptual world is impossible. The existence of the things determined in time belongs to the phenomenon world by the inevitable laws of physics, while freedom belongs to the same being seen as the free thing.

It can be seen that freedom is a concept that belongs to the ontology or metaphysical field that removes experience.

Moral law or practical law is the principle that a limited rational being does not rely on substance but only on form to determine his will, and it is rational himself to legislate for himself. A core idea that runs through the criticism of practical reason is that the moral law cannot be motivated by happiness or have any substantive content.

Freedom and self-discipline

Since freedom is only the principle of formal legislation, what Kant understood is that freedom is that the will must be considered as completely independent of the natural law of phenomena, that is, independent of the law of causality, or rather independent of the laws of succession. But such independence is called freedom in the strictest understanding, in the a priori understanding. The freedom of human will is not regulated by its nature, but merely the code of conduct and the universal law, namely, the moral law. In moral behavior, the subject's hobby, emotion and happiness cannot be the motivation of behavior, but can only take the moral law as the objective motivation of behavior. Kant calls the behavior of the same code of conduct and the moral law and the universal law the self-discipline, while otherwise the behavior is the rhythmic ^[2]. The rhythmic material is also called the practice of behavior. All the practical principles of qualitative material can be attributed to the principles of self-love or self-happiness, and the provisions of behavior are based on the feelings of the subject and on the emotional feelings. Such conduct cannot be moral conduct. Because emotion, pleasure, and so on can not have the universality and consistency of moral behavior requirements. This behavior only considers how long the object can bring to him how much happiness, and ultimately can only lead to some kind of animal behavior. The essence of morality is not coercive but is freedom, and moral behavior must be free behavior. No choice of behavior is not free, and such behavior does not have the meaning of good and evil. However, freedom does not mean arbitrary, freedom should have a certain limit. The law of moral freedom is self-discipline in Kant philosophy.

Third, freedom is the practical moral connection of two worlds, namely sensory world and transcendental world

Kant's three criticisms focus not only on the criticism of Pure Reason and on finding the basis for science, but also on promoting the creation of a new metaphysical system. He believed that the traditional metaphysics applied speculative reason to the supersensitive world that it should not use, resulting in a metaphysical crisis, that is, philosophy can neither be the reason for science nor solve the contradiction between reason and freedom. Kant constructed the metaphysical system through the three major criticisms, and he put the real freedom in the field of practice or morality, so some people called Kant's philosophy as moral metaphysics or moral ontology. So how does Kant communicate with pure speculative reason and practical reason, and between the sensory world and the transcendental world? In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant, in order to ensure the happiness of the sensory world and the moral consistency in the field of practice, put forward two generalities: the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. He hopes to use the immortality of the soul to guide the limited rational beings to follow the call of moral law, cultivate a sense of respect for morality, and let the existence of God provide a basis for happiness. Kant seems that God as a theory is different from a religious God and perhaps more appropriate to understand him as infinite reason. In addition to guaranteeing the unity of the two worlds through the public establishment of soul immortality and the existence of God, a similar role of the concept of freedom is seen from Kant's view of freedom. Kant shifted the focus of philosophy from object to subject, a transformation that he called a "Copernican revolution". If reason is regarded as a unified system, then all the basic purposes of human reason must be subject to an ultimate end, and that is, the moral destination of man. He believes that the human beings's practical reason is better than the theoretical reason, which is also the reason of the limited rational existence. It must be the practical rational reason commanding the theoretical reason, so that the reason itself will not be divided.

Fourth, The significance of Kant's view of freedom

Kant's free theory completed the "Copernicus revolution" of free theory. For the first time, he established the law of free will as the law of man himself. This law comes not from the natural instinct needs of man, nor from the authority and revelation of God, but from the universal requirements and norms set by reason for himself. His theory of freedom is in many ways beyond his predecessors, just as his purely rational critical epistemology, has a great influence in the modern western philosophical theory of freedom.

1. Kant's exploration of freedom from two levels is in line with human natural nature. His view of freedom shows that we should take into account two aspects, namely natural fact and value. At the level of natural facts, the discussion of freedom mainly considers how to transform nature and society more reasonably, so that people are less bound by nature and society. Freedom on this level is more related to people's material needs and spiritual enjoyment, and it is more related to people's finiteness. ^[3]. From the perspective

of value, the discussion of freedom mainly considers how people transcend the limitations of natural inevitability and seek the value and meaning of human existence from the ultimate and ideal level, which is more related to the infinite tendency of human yearning. The external freedom (the freedom of experience) at the level of natural fact and the internal freedom (moral freedom) at the level of value are unified in the contradictory subject of man. At the same time, Kant's thought that internal freedom is higher than external freedom also has a profound inspiration for how to promote the current human freedom.

2. Kant criticized the traditional rationalism about the disadvantages of freedom and responded to the Christian philosophy asking the ultimate meaning and value of life, thus realizing a change in the history of freedom theory. Kant pointed out that man is not free because of knowledge and wisdom, nor by God, but because of autonomy and discipline in the moral field. Freedom is the essence of a rational man. This is an effort of the construction of Kant's prior philosophy to save human freedom from the prior level when the exploration of the freedom problem is in trouble.

3. At the real social level, Kant has established a solid moral foundation for personal freedom, so his justification of freedom is more profound than other liberals. Kant's unique contribution to the development of liberal theory, which is manifested by establishing a solid moral foundation for personal freedom.

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