

Analysis of Kant's "Practical Rational Criticism"

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Abstract

Kant's "Practical rational criticism" established the people's behavior that should be "absolute command", and highlighted the basic way of human to the kindness. Kant's research result has a realistic significance: practice is rational; people's practice is free. But this freedom is based on the premise of moral law; the goal of practical rational goal is to reach the kindness level.

Key words: Kant; Practical rational criticism; Phenomenon; Intellectuality

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INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant was born on 22 April 1724, and died on 12 February 1804. As a German philosopher, Kant is widely considered to be a central figure in modern philosophy. The *Critique of Practical Reason (Kritik der praktischen Vernunft)* was published in 1788. The *Metaphysics of Morals (Die Metaphysik der Sitten)* was published in 1797, which dealt with ethics. The *Critique of Judgment (Kritik der Urteilskraft)* was published in 1790, which looks at aesthetics and teleology. They are the most important works of Kant. Kant's "Practical rational criticism" established the people's behavior that should be "absolute command", and highlighted the basic way of human to the kindness. Kant thinks that reason is

the source of morality and human experience is guided by some basic concepts. Human's experiences are decided by some basic elements of our minds. Our experience is controlled by our mind. In other words, all human experience has similar basic structural characteristics. In terms of space and time, Kant argues that all human experience is based on space and time, and our concepts of cause and effect are also based on space and time. Because of Kant's criticism of rationality and practical rationality, the modern metaphysics has found out its way out and it is very helpful for us to get to know the history of the idea of rationality philosophy in modern rationalism and empiricism. Kant's thought has a major influence in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics.

In the development of Kant's philosophy, as the elements of metaphysics, practical rationality makes moral philosophy at the core of Kant's philosophy system. Therefore, grasping the practical rationality, understanding the practical rationality and the theory of rational dichotomy is the premise of normal understanding of Kant's moral philosophy.

1. THE BASIC THEORY OF KANT'S "PRACTICAL RATIONAL CRITICISM"

Kant named "introduction" of "Practical rational criticism" as "the concept of practical rational criticism". He used a short length, forthrightly expression and bright, clear language accurately expounded the basic idea of practical rational criticism: rationality. The first word using the text is "rationality". The book is gradually expanding based on the concept of "rationality" and is about discussion between practical rationality and rational practice. The so-called "rationality" in German classical philosophy, usually is relative to "intellectuality". According to Kant, human cognition has perception, intellectuality and rationality three links. Perception organizes the perceptual

materials in order to constitute a coherent knowledge. But it can only recognize the “phenomenon”, otherwise the rational demands to recognize “ontology”. However, rationality often stuck in a solution of contradiction which Kant called it the status of antinomy while in the discussion of finiteness, infiniteness, simplicity and complexity of the world. Kant predicated rationality is unable to know “ontology”.

Of Kant’s moral philosophy, there are three works written by Kant, which fully demonstrate his moral philosophy. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* was published in 1785; *Critique of Practical Reason* was published in 1788; *Metaphysics of Morals* was published in 1797. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant made great effort to transfer our daily, easy-to-see, rational knowledge of morality into philosophical knowledge. In both *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Metaphysics of Morals* (1985), Kant used the method called “practical reason” to carry out his research. “Practical Reason”, according to Kant, should be based only upon things about which reason can tell us, and it can’t be obtained from any principles from experience. By way of using “practical reason”, Kant reached conclusions which are able to be used in the world of experience.

Kant uses the term “Categorical Imperative” to the demands of the moral law. He thinks there is a single moral obligation. This is from the concept of duty. According to Kant, Categorical imperatives are principles that are valid by themselves. All people must obey those principles in all circumstances and situation because those principles are good in and of themselves. All other moral obligations come from the Categorical Imperative. And the Categorical Imperative can be used to exam all moral all moral obligations. The categorical imperative can be used to explain the moral means and ends. According t Kant, rational beings can pursue certain “ends” using the appropriate “means”. But Kant also pointed out that the categorical imperative might be based only on something that is an “end in itself”, not to some other need, desire, or purpose. The moral law is a principle of reason itself. Kant believed that moral obligation is only applicable to rational agents. To Kant, a categorical imperative has the force of an obligation. It is an unconditional obligation regardless of one’s will or desires.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785) Kant worked out three formulations of the categorical imperative that he believed to be identical. The action without moral value means is an action done which is done without the motive of duty. There is no action without pure intention behind it. Kant believed that the feeling for carrying out the action adds value to the result, though the final result might not be the most important aspect of an action. Kant also put forward “counter-

utilitarian idea in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*.

It is a concept that is an axiom in economics. If we consider individual rights, aggregate utility will be lessened. There is a difference between preferences and values. There is nothing in the world that has neither a price nor a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent. Whatever is above all price, and it has a dignity.

However, that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself does not have mere relative worth, i.e., price, but an intrinsic worth, i.e., a dignity. (p.53, italics in original). Kant used the phrase, *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus* to generalize the nature of the counter-utilitarian nature of his moral philosophy. It means “Let justice be done, though the world perish”). Kant translates loosely as “Let justice reign even if all the rascals in the world should perish from it”.

Practical rationality is the core category of Kant’s moral philosophy and the precondition of moral metaphysics argument. Moral metaphysics is from innate principle to find the moral law and is a kind of exploring of practical rationality to the ultimate quest. Only we dichotomize the pure rationality, demarcate the theory of rationality and clear the significance of practical rationality, we can solve the crisis of modern metaphysics and the problems of theory of rational tools. Kant’s moral philosophy becoming the modern moral philosophy thoughts is because of moral metaphysics. The proposing of practical rationality is of great importance to the development of Kant’s moral philosophy.

In “Practical rational criticisms”, Kant first defined the concept of practical rationality, answered the question “what is the practical rationality?” which is also the foundation of argument and the primary question. Kant defined the concept of practical rationality in the way of difference between the theoretical rationality and practical rationality. On the issue of the application of rationality, theoretically, what the theory of rationality concerns is the main body of cognition; practically, what the practical rationality concerns is the basis of practice, namely what is will according to? Willpower is their ability to realize the object. Will is a kind of ability that rules themselves the cause of practice, or it may be able to produce an ability to adapt a objective require. Practical rationality has to have regulation basis, once you have it, you have the objective reality. Secondly, on this basis, he determined the pure reason is the regulation basis of a (subjective) will. Kant first put forward the concept of “freedom” being the basic attribute of human beings. He thinks that freedom is the cause concept of the pure rationality. So he concluded that “pure reason can be practical, and also that only pure rationality, rather than empirical limited rationality, is unconditionally practical.” “Pure reason itself contains

all of criterion of criticism." That is to say, the practice in accordance with the practice of pure practical rationality, or rational practice, is a valuable one. Thirdly, he expounded the practical path and methods of the rational criticism. He started from the difference between the path and methods of practical rationality and speculative rationality. Now that the practical rational criticism is based on a firm foundation for practical application of pure rational knowledge, then, in the research of practical rationality, we will have to have factors theory and methodology of practical rationality. In the factors theory, there should have a analysis theory for truth regulation and dialectical theory for practical rational judgment and description of reasoning. In analytical theory, study "starts from the principle and into the concept, and starting from the concept can get into the feeling as much as possible." On the contrary, in the speculative rationality there, we must start from feeling and end at the principle." The reason is practical rationality involves the will, and must not in a relationship with the object, but with the relation between the will and the reasons to consider the rationality, because the theory that is not subject to empirical principle must be the beginning. After this we can try to make sure we have those concepts according to the will of such a regulation, the application of it on the object and application on the main bodies. Therefore, practical rationality is about the definition of "practice", judgment and reasoning, and also the will of the subject about the practice of stipulation and confirmation for the provisions of the main practical body's will.

"Practical Rational Criticism" aimed to explore and reveal the entity of "pure practical rationality" by analyzing "the application ability of rationality", and on this basis, legislate for practice. Kant pointed out in the "preface", "just using the pure practical rationality" as the standard of practical rationality to criticize "rationality's all practical ability", rather than "pure ability itself". That is to say this ability itself is irrelevant; the important is that whether all practical ability of rationality accords with the requirement of "pure practical rationality" or the use of practical ability can't exceed the demands of practical rationality.

2. PRACTICAL RATIONALITY IN PREFERENCE TO THEORETICAL RATIONALITY

Theory of rational refers to the cognition of people. In the field of epistemology, it considers the relationship between rationality and objects explaining what people can do. Practical rationality refers to the ability of the men's will. In the field of ethics, it inspects the relation between rationality and will and is transcendent indicating what ought to be. In the distinction between the two cases, Kant demonstrated the practical rationality in moral

metaphysics. But it also emphasizes the unity of the both indicating that this unity implying practical rationality priors to theoretical rationality and all priority after all belong to the scope of practice, and even a philosophical priority is conditioned, and can only be accomplished in practice. The combination of speculative rationality and practical rationality is not accidental, but inevitable. Kant philosophy's relationship of ontology and phenomenon, purpose and means and freedom and necessity can specifically illustrate this principle.

2.1 Nature Above Phenomenon

The phenomenon that is the empirical representation in a causal relationship is limited. Ontology is the final cause of the phenomenon; it transcendently exists not subject to the limit of the causal relationship. Theoretical rationality regards the phenomenon as the cognitive object. Although the nature of rationality requires transcending the phenomenon to grasp the infinite, but once cross the line, antinomy occurs. Thus theoretical rationality must be defined in the field of phenomenon. It can be seen from the argumentation process of Kant's moral philosophy that rationality pursuits the moral ontology completely ruling out the form of experience and interest is the basis of morality. The object practical rationality and theoretical rationality reflect practical rationality is higher than theoretical rationality.

2.2 Purpose Above Means

Kant argues that the existence of man is both perceptual and rational. As the perceptual existence, men belong to the phenomenon, restricted by natural causality, having the substantive requirements, such as desire, interest, and so become a means of satisfying them. But for humankind, the more important thing is that people are rational beings. As rational beings, one can transcend the restriction of natural causality, becoming an independent subject having intrinsic value and purpose. Rational knowledge of experience masters the rule of causal phenomenon providing a means of satisfying the needs of people's desire, practicing rational exploration of people's subjectivity and implementation of people as the purpose of rules. So that practical rationality is higher than the rational knowledge of realizing the essence of human existence.

2.3 Freedom Higher Than Necessary

Freedom and necessity are a pair of opposite categories. The former is beyond the restriction of natural necessity independent state and has the form of universal law as a state of enough motivation. The latter shows the state that restricted by in the phenomenon of cause and effect relation. Practical rationality beyond experience getting rid of restriction of the inevitability, and is completely independent of interconnected natural imagination. Also it has the initiative to grasp the moral law, and ability to act in accordance with the moral law. It indicates that

people legislate for themselves and freedom is the basis of practical rationality. Theoretical rationality grasps the causal relationship between the phenomena and legislates for nature reflecting human beings is the subject of nature, but the existence of perception makes people inherently inevitable. Therefore, corresponding to freedom and necessity, practical rationality is higher than the theoretical rationality.

3. RETHINKING OF “PRACTICAL RATIONAL CRITICISM”

Kant is great. He has genius, excellent and productive research in “practice” and “rationality”. The results of his study still have important guiding significance to today’s research and practice. The main aspects summed up as follows:

A. The practice is rational which is to say the practice is an activity with conscious. The right rational practice activities should follow certain principles (or rules).

B. The practice activity of people is free, but this freedom is based on the premise of the moral law. So as a pure rational general regulation, moral law legislates for practical rationality. The provision of the pure will itself is according to the moral law.

C. The goal of the practical rationality is to reach the kindness state which includes happiness and virtue (or obligation). When good virtue exist with happiness, the kindness is perfect. In an ideal situation, rational practitioners should consciously faithful in the moral law. In rational practice situation, one should achieve a unified state of happiness and obligation.

D. Attach great importance to moral education. Focus on people’s moral emotion, moral interests, and implantation of moral personality, moral belief and understanding of the purity of free will. Make the law of practical rationality internalize their human mental set and become a real motivation in people’s behavior. Make people’s intentions have morality; behavior is legal and so on.

CONCLUSION

Kant has profound influence on Western thought. He has changed the paradigm of philosophical inquiry. Very little philosophy is now carried out in the style of pre-Kantian philosophy because he accomplished this paradigm shift. This shift comprises of several closely related innovations in philosophy itself and in the social sciences and humanities in general. Kant’s philosophical revolution, which placed the role of the human subject at the center of inquiry into our knowledge, is such that we can not philosophize about things as they are independently of us or of how they are to us. His critical philosophy enables us

to discover and systematically explore possible inherent limits to our ability to know by way of philosophical reasoning. He introduced the concept of “conditions of possibility”, in other words, “the conditions of possible experience”. It states that things, knowledge, and forms of consciousness rest on prior conditions that make them possible. Therefore, if we want to understand or to know them, we must understand these conditions on the first hand. He states that objective experience is actively constituted or constructed by the functioning of the human mind, and he also regards moral autonomy as central to humanity. He asserted that the principle that human beings should be treated as ends rather than as means. All of his Kant’s theories above can be seen today in schools of thought as different from one another as German Idealism, Marxism, positivism, phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, linguistic philosophy, structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstructionism. His ideas influenced many thinkers in Germany during his lifetime, and he moved philosophy beyond the debate between the rationalists and empiricists. He is regarded as a key figure in the history and development of philosophy.

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