

The Copernicus Revolution from the Perspective of Human Subjectivity

Hao Wang

Nanjing Audit University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 211815, China

Keywords: Subjectivity, Copernicus revolution, Epistemology, Rationality

Abstract: In modern western philosophy, the turn of epistemology is a major issue, and many philosophers are trying to find the most solid foundation for knowledge. However, with the continuous use and in-depth criticism of rational ability, it has shaken the entire knowledge building. At this time, Kant put forward the Copernicus revolution and asked to break the previous objective-centered cognitive research direction and turn to subject-centered, thus solving the philosophical crisis. Kant's idea is not his original creation, but a concentrated reflection of the development of human subjectivity throughout the history of western philosophy. This paper attempts to analyze the evolution of human subjectivity and the embodiment of subjectivity in Kant's Copernicus revolution, to show Kant's breakthrough achievements in this perspective, and the significance of today's research and life.

1. Introduction

Europe in the 18th century was an era of reflection and criticism. With the rapid development of natural science, the field of philosophy was gradually subdivided, and the accuracy and universality of science also brought new directions and methods to the development of philosophy. On the one hand, the development of science has cleared the obstacles for modern philosophy and seriously damaged scholastic philosophy, but science itself has not carried out profound thinking on the source of knowledge. Science has discovered a large number of natural laws and mathematical knowledge by its methods, but it has not discussed how knowledge is possible and how the certainty of knowledge comes from. Therefore, this task has been entrusted to modern philosophy, that is, to lay the foundation of certainty for knowledge. For example, Locke's "On Human Understanding" proposed that the task of epistemology is to "explore the origin, certainty and scope of human knowledge." Therefore, modern philosophy embodies a turn of epistemology, showing a feature of reflection and foundation. On the other hand, under the influence of natural science, various philosophers began to actively imitate scientific methods to criticize and apply philosophy, such as Descartes, the founder of rationalism, and Bacon, the founder of empiricism. The former uses the method of "universal mathematics" to strictly infer the certainty of knowledge, while the latter follows the experimental method and inductive method since Aristotle to obtain true and reliable knowledge. They all believe that there is a universal method that can be applied to science and philosophy, and this method can lay the foundation for the reliability of knowledge[1].

In this era, the role of human is becoming increasingly prominent. The so-called foundation of epistemology is actually a reflection and proof of whether human beings can have cognitive ability and obtain certain knowledge. In the process of human's gradual expansion of the external world through scientific progress, human beings have also realized a gradual understanding of themselves. After several ideological emancipation movements, from the humanism of the Renaissance to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the belief of human beings in their own abilities and the use of scientific methods considered to be universal, modern philosophy has constructed a grand epistemological system. In this process, due to different views on the origin of knowledge and the source of certainty and the different scientific methods used, two different schools of rationalism and empiricism emerged. Rationalism shows a tendency to rebuild metaphysics, and believes that the certainty of knowledge comes from the concept of talent, acknowledges the existence of entities, and is the basis for human beings to seek knowledge from outside, which belongs to the exogenous tendency, and finally moves towards dogmatism; While empiricism is constantly criticizing, from

Locke to Berkeley to Hume, it carries out the principle of experience to the end, and negates the existence of external entities step by step, but it moves towards skepticism and agnosticism. At this time, the building of human knowledge becomes precarious, and the causal relationship becomes an illegal application. Accepting dogmatism or moving towards agnosticism seems to become an irreconcilable binary opposition[2].

In the face of this situation, Kant put forward the “Copernicus Revolution”. He believes that the emergence of this problem comes from the traditional theory of truth conformity, that is, people's understanding must conform to the object, and subjective conformity to the objective can obtain the truth. This practice presupposes in advance that people have the ability to acquire knowledge, while the source of knowledge is still passively dependent on external objects. Therefore, this inevitably leads to the problem of the consistency between the subject and the object, that is, the subject's knowledge comes from the object, and the existence of the object depends on the subject's understanding of the object. This is a paradox of repeated proof. In order to restore the authority of human reason and knowledge, Kant proposed that we need to carry out a “Copernicus revolution” in the field of philosophy. He believed that it is not the subject that should conform to the object, but the object that should conform to the internal form of the subject, that is, that human beings have a capability that precedes the intuitive object. This intuitive ability can not only determine what people perceive, but also what they perceive can become knowledge only when combined with this ability. In Critique of Pure Reason, it can be summarized as two points: first, knowledge must be a combination of sensibility and intellectuality; Secondly, the transcendental category can produce knowledge only when applied to experience. Only in this way can we solve the contradiction between the subject and the object. The research focus on the object formed since Aristotle has been completely reversed. People no longer rely on passive acceptance of the external object to obtain knowledge, but the external object can only form knowledge if it conforms to people's cognitive ability. In this respect, Kant also raised the subject status of human beings to an unprecedented level, which has epoch-making significance[3].

2. The Development of Human Subjectivity in Western Philosophy

Kant's subjective and objective turn of thought is not what he accidentally discovered and put forward, but what he has always had in the history of western philosophy. Since the birth of philosophy, man and the world, subject and object are the most fundamental issues. The human potential as the subject must have contact with the world of the object, and philosophy is the thought that human beings exist in the world and think about the world. In the continuous development of philosophy, the subject status of human is also increasingly prominent. Thales, the first philosopher in the West, broke the stereotype of the previous mythological world view because he showed that “water is the origin of the world”, and showed that people can use their own thoughts to analyze the world and determine the origin of the world within the scope of their own control, and no longer need to rely on external gods to create the world. Through this recognition and mastery of one's own ability, the subject status of human beings was discovered, and philosophy began to develop[4].

The early philosophers confirmed the ability of man by exploring the origin, and Socrates further confirmed the subject status of man in Athens. Socrates refuted the sceptical tendency of the school of wise men to deny that there is a universal truth, that everyone is a dictator of his own knowledge, and pointed out that “virtue is knowledge”. Through spiritual midwifery and universally defined methods, as long as people play their own rationality, they can obtain reliable knowledge. Socrates “pulled philosophy back from heaven to earth”, and proposed for the first time that philosophy should not be separated from external research on nature, but should study the problems of human beings and human society. So the subjectivity of human being is reflected, and philosophy has become a science of studying “human”[5].

After that, Plato and Aristotle further developed Socrates' epistemology. In order to determine the reliability of human knowledge, Plato used the method of idealism to find the basis for Socrates' knowledge source and universal definition. He believes that the world is divided into the perceptible

world and the knowable world. The perceptible world is the imitation of the knowable world, that is, the idea world. People live in the changeable perceptible world, but the soul of people takes care of knowledge in the idea world. Therefore, the learning process of people is to constantly recall the existing knowledge in the soul, thus determining the possibility of human being to obtain knowledge. Aristotle, on the other hand, explored the possibility of human cognition from another aspect. In "On the Soul", he put forward the whiteboard for the first time. He thought that the soul was like a writing board. Although it could potentially remember anything, it was actually nothing before it had thought. Aristotle believed that the source of sensory knowledge was generated through the stimulation of the soul by the perceptible form, which can be reflected by human's sense and reason, thus confirming the possibility of human having cognitive ability. Both Plato and Aristotle have demonstrated from their respective perspectives that man as a subject can have a certain degree of certainty about the object world and himself, and has improved man's subject status. Plato's thought affected the later rationalists, who ensured the reliability of cognition through the concept of talent, while Aristotle's thought affected the later empiricists, that is, from the perspective of the cognitive ability of the subject, through the stimulation of the object to the senses to obtain empirical knowledge[6].

In the Middle Ages, philosophy was reduced to the servant of theology, and the issue of epistemology evolved into the debate between rationality and belief, realism and nominalism. No matter where, God is an indispensable suspended device, which is the speculation under the guidance of theology, and the subject status of human is greatly reduced.

After the long Middle Ages, with the opening of the Renaissance, people were discovered again. Humanism and scientific progress have constantly broken the shackles of religion. The Enlightenment and religious reform came into being, and human rationality has become the banner of this era. At the same time, with the turn of modern epistemology, philosophy also began to conduct more in-depth research on the generation and certainty of knowledge, and followed the two systems of Plato and Aristotle to form two major schools of rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism provides a certainty for human cognition and human subject status through the external objectivity of the concept of talent, while empiricism determines the possibility of cognition through human's own cognitive ability. Therefore, rationalism eventually slipped to dogmatism, while empiricism, represented by Hume, carried out the principle of experience to the end, and finally moved to agnosticism. Both of the two factions are for the purpose of establishing human subjectivity and the possibility of cognition. At the same time, people are constantly using their rational abilities to reflect and criticize, which shows the continuous growth of human self-consciousness. However, the unlimited rise of rationality will eventually lead to the instability of the whole knowledge building. Therefore, Kant proposed to realize a Copernican revolution, which will really raise the subject status to a new level, and solve the binary opposition between the subject and the object, as well as confirm the reliability of human knowledge ability[7-8].

3. An Analysis of Subjectivity in Kant's Copernicus Revolution

At the beginning, Kant accepted the Leibniz-Wolf system, which is also a kind of rational dogmatism. But through Hume's skepticism, he realized that we must face up to the relationship between the subject and the object, as well as the criticism and proof of human cognitive ability. So Kant's Copernicus revolution, on the one hand, was to respond to Hume's question. He believed that Hume's skepticism was justifiable, necessary and correct, but it should not go towards agnosticism and skepticism in the end. Hume also criticized Locke's empiricism while inheriting the empiricism tradition. He denied the definition of entity and believed that all knowledge was based on sensory experience. At the same time, Hume was not satisfied with Locke's rational criticism, because Locke only focused on the investigation of human experience and the scope and limits of the external world, and still did not escape the investigation direction of taking the object as the center and ignoring the cognitive ability of the subject. Before studying the cognitive structure of the subject, Locke concluded that people can understand the external things and can obtain certainty support within its scope. Hume began to shift the focus of epistemological research from the

investigation of the object to the investigation of the internal structure of the subject, breaking the research tradition since Aristotle. Hume pointed out that human nature is rationality, and intellect is the most important part of it. The study of cognition must start with the subject, and first of all, explore the possibility of human knowledge. Hume constructed an intellectual criticism focusing on subject research, but Hume narrowly divided knowledge into two types, namely, knowledge about conceptual relations and knowledge about facts. The former mainly refers to mathematical knowledge, which is a congenital analytical proposition, and the latter mainly refers to empirical scientific knowledge, which is an acquired comprehensive proposition. This narrow classification led to Hume's conclusion that causality is not knowledge, and can only give a naturalistic explanation - habit is a great guide to life. Finally, it moves towards agnosticism and skepticism. Inspired by Hume, Kant proposed that the main type of human knowledge is the congenital comprehensive proposition, that is, the predicate is not included in the subject, but also has universal necessity. He believes that empiricism cannot solve the problem of consistency between subject and object and the problem of obtaining universal necessity knowledge from the perspective of neural sensory characteristics. So Kant decided to start with the subject and define the empirical knowledge of the object according to the requirements of the subject. He said that we might as well look at how mathematics and physics have made great achievements: when a person launches a revolution, it is no longer a matter of people staring at a figure and asking themselves to recognize its characteristics, but rather to ask the shape of specific things to conform to the figure constructed by themselves. And physics also adds human rationality to the nature. It is no longer like a student asking a teacher, but uses its own ability to make the experimental results meet expectations. This transformation of the traditional way of taking the object as the center and the subject around the object in the process of cognition into taking the subject as the center, and the object should conform to the internal form of the subject, which is the essence of the Comte Copernicus revolution and the awakening of the subject consciousness in epistemology. People's initiative has been further expanded, and their awareness and use of their own rationality have also been improved. As Marx pointed out in the Outline of Feuerbach, the "main shortcoming" of materialism in the past is that the understanding of things, reality and sensibility is only from the form of object or intuition, not from the perceptual activity of human beings, as practice, not from the subjective aspect, so it is idealism that develops the dynamic aspect.

On the other hand, Kant's Copernicus revolution is also an inheritance and deepening of human rationality and subjective consciousness since the Enlightenment. Kant summarized the enlightenment movement and put forward "Sapere aude!" (have the courage to use your rationality!) With the progress of science and technology and the change of political system, people gradually get rid of the immature state, have a deeper understanding of the world outside, and have more confidence in the use of their own rational ability, and people's subjective consciousness has been fully developed. Among them, Kant particularly praised Rousseau's theory of conscience. Rousseau believed that conscience is a kind of moral instinct born in life, which develops dialectically with the development of society. "Social moral practice brings human love to people's hearts". In this process, people can use reason to find the relationship between things and acquire knowledge, but it cannot guarantee the good and avoid evil, while conscience has the judgment of good and evil. It is not only the starting point of survival, but also has a self-discipline. It can act as a rational guardian to lead people to the right path and obtain the right knowledge. In the popular religious moral thought and the rationalist ethical thought of the Enlightenment, the religious moral thought believed that all moral acts were arranged by God; The rationalist ethical thought carries out moral practice from the perspective of utilitarianism, both of which are heteronomous. Rousseau's theory of conscience has the characteristics of moral self-discipline and motivation theory, that is, it believes that moral practice is derived from the intrinsic essence of human beings (conscience), rather than from the legislator or absolute domination of human beings. Rousseau replaced the spiritual privilege of a few elites with the common essence of human beings - conscience, discovered the true value of human beings, and raised human subject consciousness from epistemology to the moral class. In absorbing Rousseau's conscience theory, Kant pointed out that

conscience is actually the highest reason. The same reason legislates for nature in the natural world and for human beings in the ontology.

In nature, human beings form perceptual intuition through the combination of their own perceptual form and the perceptual variety they receive, and then apply the principle to the phenomenon and the nature as a whole through the category, so that all the phenomena we experience must be subject to the comprehensive cooperation of the category and be integrated into the whole of the phenomenal world with universal necessity. The passive state of human in nature is broken and the subjectivity is improved. In the field of ontology, Kant made the consciousness of every rational being the will to promulgate universal laws through absolute laws, and realized the legislation of man himself. Everyone is not only a lawmaker who makes moral laws, but also a law-abiding person who abides by moral laws. People can only be regarded as an end, not as a tool to achieve a certain purpose, so that people can obtain the fullest freedom. And moral practice should also be for moral reasons rather than for moral or other heteronomy reasons. From the moral level, it has realized a change to the subject, thus implementing Kant's Copernicus revolution, realizing the exploration of human self, and improving the status of subjectivity.

In addition, Kant also deeply criticized the three themes of traditional metaphysics: soul, world and God. He believes that this is a transcendental illusion generated by the continuous rise of rationality and the use of transcendence. This trend of rationality is its natural endowment. As long as it is used correctly within the scope of experience, it can only have a "guiding role" to serve people in the ontology. Therefore, the soul, the world and the God of traditional metaphysics have been transformed into three moral postulates in the ontology: free will, immortality of the soul, and the existence of God, which have become an auxiliary for people to carry out moral practice and reflect the status of human subjectivity from the side.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, Kant's Copernicus revolution is a breakthrough in the continuous discovery of human subjectivity consciousness and status in the history of western philosophy for thousands of years. It comes from the continuous grasp of human cognitive ability and the continuous improvement of human subject status. On the one hand, Kant criticized Hume's classification of epistemological issues, and on the other hand, he inherited the thoughts of the Enlightenment, especially Rousseau's view of human nature. Since Kant, human beings have really possessed the confirmation of their own abilities and the grasp of external knowledge. Human beings are no longer in a passive state in nature and ontology, but begin to understand nature and themselves in a positive and active way. Some people compare Kant to a cistern, in which all previous philosophical ideas flow in, and later philosophical ideas flow out. The influence of Kant can be seen from Ficht's practical knowledge, Schelling's philosophy of identity and Hegel's absolute spirit. Marx's kingdom of all-round and free development of human beings is a complete display of subjectivity and a complete combination of highly consistent with the object.

Kant's Copernicus revolution can give us a new perspective to examine the development of western philosophy, and also enlighten us to analyze problems from multiple aspects, dare to use our own rationality, and seek breakthrough development. In today's complex society, we need to adhere to the status of subjectivity. We should first have a clear understanding and criticism of ourselves, and we should not take it as the ultimate goal to replace human values in pursuit of others. Adhering to people-oriented and people-centered, we can stand up to the moral subject consciousness in the face of material temptation and sensory enjoyment, realize the essence of human nature, and never forget our original intention, so as to achieve true freedom and development.

References

[1] Kant, Deng Xiaomang. Critique of Pure Reason [M]. People's Publishing House, 2004.

- [2] Complete Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 1 [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1965.
- [3] Dai Jicheng. The humanistic significance of Kant's "Copernicus Revolution" [J]. Tangdu Academic Journal, 2008 (01): 110-113.
- [4] Liu Su. Objectivity: the key to understanding Kant's "Copernicus Revolution" [J]. Journal of Shandong University of Technology (Social Science Edition), 2011,27 (02): 32-34.
- [5] Rousseau, Fang Qing. Emile [M]. Beijing Publishing House, 2008.
- [6] Hume, David, Lv, Daji. Research on human intelligence [J]. China Legal Publishing House, 2011.
- [7] Deng Xiaomang. Lectures on Kant's Philosophy [M]. Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005.
- [8] Lee, Anne, Peck. Sapere Aude! The Importance of a Moral Education in Kant's Doctrine of Virtue [J]. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 2007.