

The Connotation of the Western Concept of "Rationality" and Its Changing Meaning

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Abstract

Reason is the core category of Western philosophy. Western philosophy has always shone with the light of rationality, and a main line connecting the theoretical doctrines of various Western philosophies is rationality. This paper mainly discusses the essential rationality of ancient ontology, the instrumental rationality of modern epistemology, and the value rationality of modern philosophy. In the modernization of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is of great practical significance to understand the connotation and change of meaning of the Western concept of rationality, and to correctly grasp the multiple correlations and intrinsic essence of rationality, in order to establish the spirit of rationality in the times.

Keywords

Western; rationality; change of meaning.

1. Introduction

Today is both an era of rapid technological development and an era of high humanism. The development of the times calls for the spirit of rationality and the need to look at the world from a cold perspective. Rationality is a core category of Western philosophy, and it is the character of human beings to rationally deal with social laws, axioms, order and norms. In different historical periods, the connotation of rationality and the role it plays in the development of human society are extremely different. Thus, it gives reason different meanings. In a sense, the development and evolution of rationality is the epitome of the development and evolution of Western philosophy, and rationality and the spirit of rationality have deeply penetrated into human civilization. "The stone of other mountains can attack jade." In the modernization of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is of great practical significance to have a deeper understanding of the connotation and significance of Western rationality, and to correctly grasp the multiple correlations and inner essence of rationality, in order to establish the spirit of epochalism, and to correctly understand, analyze, and deal with the problems of nature, society, and life.

2. The Essential Rationality of Ancient Ontology and Its Significance

Western philosophy originated in ancient Greece. The period from ancient Greece to the Renaissance was the classical stage of reason. During this period, many philosophers interpreted reason differently, but in the early period of ancient Greek philosophy, "essential reason" always dominated.

Rationales or Reason - from the Greek word "Nous" - refers to the soul of a person or thing, a fine, dynamic, material being, capable of driving things to movement, change and development. Rationality was originally derived from the concepts of "logos" in Heraclitus and "Nous" in Ascalagoras.

According to Heraclitus, all things in the world are in motion and change, and their laws of operation are eternal and unchanging, and this eternal and unchanging law is "logos". In Greek,

"logos" has various meanings, referring to both words and principles and principles, as well as laws and necessity, which later developed into the word "logic". In Heraclitus' philosophy, "logos" is reason, something that exists in natural objects and human beings, "the common law that harmonizes all men and things", and the necessity that determines the movement, change and development of all things. Later, Heraclitus' "logos" developed into the spirit of logic in Western rationalism and became the root of people's belief in objective reason.

Asacagoras first introduced the concept of "Nous", which translates as reason, mind, soul, a spiritual thing that human beings possess, a higher, rational soul (also translated as reason) that completely transcends sensibility and materiality, i.e., as a spiritual faculty of the individual to transcend upwards, which determines the direction of all things towards a goal and "establishes the order of the world". It is a spiritual faculty of the individual that transcends upward, that determines all things toward a goal, and that "establishes the order of the world". If "logos" is the rationality of the external objective world (objective reason), then "Nous" is the rationality of the human subjective world (subjective reason). Later, the "Nous" of Ascalagoras developed into the spirit of transcendence or the spirit of freedom in Western rationalism.

The thought of the ancient Greek philosophers contains an abundance of the spirit of reason. With the exception of Heraclitus and Ascalagoras, who elaborated on the term "rationality", many philosophers dealt with human rationality or manifested the rational spirit of the human being.

Thales "water is the origin or foundation of all things" is a rational judgment made by rational thinking. Ancient Greek natural philosophers used reason to explain nature and thus denied that the gods dominated the world, demonstrating the power of human reason.

In the history of Western philosophy, Socrates is almost synonymous with reason and is seen as the embodiment and symbol of Western rationalism. According to Socrates, man is the measure of all things, but here man is the thinking man. It is human reason that is the final arbiter of the "good" in the moral realm. Socratic reason is a moral reason. The subjective consciousness of Socrates' philosophy and the rigor of his argumentation are all motivated by the contemplation of reason. At the same time, his belief in divine providence is also rooted in his philosophy of reason.

Plato constructed a philosophical system centered on Ideology on the base of Socrates' conceptual philosophy. According to Plato, man is composed of carnal desires and soul, and the human soul can be divided into three parts: desire, emotion and reason; the first two are subject to death, and only reason is immortal. According to him, reason is the noblest element of the soul, the spiritual force that keeps things just. Only reason has absolute value and is the supreme good, which enables man to control his passions and have virtue. The immortality of reason is due to the fact that it has not only the power of control and analysis, but also the power of logic which is reducible and generalizable. In Plato's philosophy, truth, goodness, and beauty naturally merge with reason, becoming the source of reason that illuminates Western philosophy.

The system of discursive philosophy constructed by Aristotle became the culmination of the development of rationalism in ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, "man is a rational animal" and "the special function of man is to have a rational life with rational principles". He raised the rationalist search for certainty to the height of philosophical ontology and grasped it discursively by summarizing the nature of individual aspects of spirit and nature into a series of rational principles. He raised the rationalist search for certainty of things to the level of philosophical ontology and grasped it discursively, summarizing the nature of individual aspects of spirit and nature into a series of rational principles. Ancient Greek rationalism reached its peak in Aristotle's "active rationality", laying a solid foundation for Western rationalism.

To summarize, the exploration of reason by ancient Greek philosophers originated from the inquiry into the origin of the universe or the world. The rationality of this period can be called "cosmic rationality" or "essential rationality" in the ontological sense. From the point of view of philosophical ontology, reason is the essence and law of things, "the property of existence itself". The use of reason in an ontological sense, lacking the subjective consciousness or spirit of self-knowledge, is consistent with the characteristics of human thought and life under the natural economic conditions of the time. In ancient Greece, through the development of such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, rationalism occupied a high position in social life. In the Western cultural world, the ancient Greek tradition of using rational thinking to analyze problems has been passed on, such as Descartes' theory of solipsism and the European Enlightenment, all of which bear the ideological imprint of the ancient Greek rational tradition.

3. Instrumental rationality and its significance in modern epistemology

In medieval Europe, religious thought occupied an absolute position, and reason, as a ladder to reach God, was particularly valued by Christian theologians, and philosophy in this period became the handmaiden of theology. Nonetheless, philosophers engaged in a long debate about common and individual, faith and reason: Aquinas divided human reason into active and passive reason; Rogier Bacon argued that the path of people's acquisition of knowledge was from sense perception to rational understanding; Anselm asserted that faith was superior to reason and was the basis of reason, and that God was the Most Perfect; Duns Scotus argued that God's will was absolutely free, and that it was not possible for human beings to know God through limited reason it is impossible to know God.

In modern Western countries, one of the changes in rationality is generalization and valorization, which has been widely applied to the fields of human beings and society, science and morality, practice and cognition.

During the Renaissance, Western philosophy began to shift from God to man, and the main theme of philosophy was "the discovery of man and the discovery of the world". What the Renaissance wanted to revive was the spirit of rationality and human dignity of the ancient Greco-Roman era. Dante affirmed the "nobility of man", which was highlighted by the praise of human reason and the desire for the liberation of individuality. Francis Bacon vigorously proclaimed the "nobility of man". Bacon vigorously proclaimed that "knowledge is power" and vigorously promoted knowledge and reason. He believed that only through reason could human beings understand and control the laws of nature. Montaigne put forward "I think about myself", advocating concern for human beings and the pursuit of human emancipation. Shakespeare, on the other hand, eulogized human reason through the mouth of Hamlet: "How like a heavenly god is noble reason in wisdom!" In short, the wisdom behind the spirit of Renaissance humanism is the spirit of reason.

Europe in the 17th-18th centuries was the Age of Reason. British philosopher Brian Mackay says, "This philosophical movement is known as rationalism. It originated indiscriminately with Descartes, and famous rationalist philosophers who followed were Spinoza and Leibniz." Modern rationality, based on the natural sciences, has abandoned the trappings of medieval theology and has developed the human capacity for scientific rationality. This rationality is also known as instrumental, cognitive, and scientific rationality. At the core of rationalist philosophy is the veneration of rational thinking and the advocacy of the use of rational thinking to obtain true knowledge and truth through rigorous logical reasoning.

Descartes put forward the principle of universal skepticism, advocating human rationality as a yardstick, examining all knowledge and concepts, and for this reason put forward the philosophical proposition of "I think, therefore I am", and argued for all things in the world from "I am". In his view, all knowledge is based on the principle of reason, and human cognition is

based on the principle of reason to deduce true and reliable knowledge. In a word, reason is the tool for people to know things. Only universal skepticism can lead to rationality. Descartes' principle of universal skepticism, the supremacy of reason and the view of instrumental rationality promote the principle of subjectivity of reason, and have positively contributed to opposing the obscurantism and beliefism of religious theology and promoting the development of science and culture.

According to Spinoza, "Freedom is the knowledge of necessity". The world we live in is full of necessity, and man must recognize and grasp this necessity and live according to reason. Only by moving from the kingdom of nature to the kingdom of necessity can we gain freedom of mind and lead to the highest happiness. According to him, knowledge comes mainly from feeling, reason and intuition. Reason is self-preservation plus understanding. While self-preservation is absolute, a person who is controlled by the passions (interests excited by the senses) cannot be rational or virtuous. Although Spinoza was not as revolutionary as Descartes in his praise of human reason, he left a monument of proper and dignified philosophy by insisting on solipsism, the pursuit of spiritual happiness, and the deductive method of reason.

Leibniz inherited the theological ideas of the Middle Ages and thoroughly rationalized them, giving his ideas a strong rationalist flavor. He recognized the existence of miracles, but God as a supra-worldly reason did not need to interfere with the world. He believed that "all the thoughts and actions of our soul come from within itself, and cannot be given to it by the senses." Human reason can gain knowledge of universals and necessities by reflecting on and recognizing the innate principles of humanity itself. Taking human conscious agency as a starting point, he fully praises human reason, but exaggerates conscious agency and falls into the quagmire of one-sidedness.

During the European Enlightenment, Enlightenment thinkers used reason as a weapon and freedom as an end in itself, hoping to use the power of reason to achieve happiness and progress in the struggle against privilege and ignorance, believing that "all men possess reason" and that "human reason can solve all problems". Therefore, they used reason as a tool to rationalize and control nature and society in the name of the interests of all mankind, and demanded the protection of human rights and the establishment of a state governed by the rule of law. The Enlightenment thinkers' promotion of reason shows its own power due to the height of humanism. For example, Voltaire scrutinized religion from a rational point of view, considered religious belief and superstition as the main enemy of human reason, fiercely attacked religious belief and superstition, and promoted the spirit of equality, fraternity and tolerance. Montesquieu takes the spirit of law as the starting point, and advocates that there exists in the world some kind of fundamental rationality that determines the relationship of everything in the world, and that the general law is the rationality of human beings, and that the laws of various countries are the specific application of human rationality on specific occasions. Man's freedom is to do all that the law permits, not to be forced to do what he should not do. Rousseau viewed freedom as innate, but this freedom is in the midst of omnipresent chains, and the struggle of mankind is to enable the individual to acquire free will on a moral level. Classical German philosophy is the highest achievement of traditional Western philosophy, which addresses the problem of the objectivity of thought, most notably in the three critiques of the classical philosopher Immanuel Kant. He regarded the critique of reason as the embodiment of the spirit of the times, believed that human beings are both animal and rational, advocated the use of reason to criticize everything, and distinguished between pure reason and practical reason, and proposed to provide a set of moral laws for the practical behavior of human beings. The so-called pure reason is the pure cognitive ability that does not depend on any experience, and pure reason is related to knowledge, legislates for nature, and makes scientific knowledge possible; the so-called practical reason is the pure moral consciousness that does not depend on any experience, and practical reason is related to the will, legislates for itself, and makes

people free to regulate their own behaviors in accordance with the laws of reason. Kant's pure reason is a priori, practical reason is the theory of the supreme good, practical reason is based on the freedom of reason, the principle of moral supremacy, and the standard of the supreme good. In his opinion, practical reason is higher than pure reason, because only practical reason can transcend the limitations of natural necessity and reach the realm of infinite freedom; the highest state pursued by human reason is virtue; practical reason is to teach people how to enjoy happiness, and the supreme good is the saintly realm achieved by the fusion of virtue and happiness. Kant pushed the modern epistemological sense of reason into moral practice, accomplished the Copernican revolution in epistemology, and thus established his philosophy of subjectivity or critical philosophy.

Hegel is the master of German classical philosophy, and his discursive philosophy pushes Western rationalism to its peak. He regarded philosophical knowledge as "pure thought" and "conceptual categories", linked reason in human nature with categories such as divine freedom, and advocated objective rationalism, believing that "reason is the soul of the world", "reason is the commonality of the world", and "philosophy is the knowledge of reason". He advocates objective rationalism and believes that "reason is the soul of the world", "reason is the commonality of the world", and "philosophy is the knowledge of reason", and the thinking activity carried out by philosophy is a purely rational thinking activity. Philosophical reason is a kind of reflection, it is man thinking in thinking, it is to rethink the thought. In Hegel's philosophy, reason has the supreme position. According to him, the original spirit belongs to the subjective spirit, while the spirit belongs to the objective spirit when it is in opposition to nature. When this spirit finally abandons nature and its external forms, it gains absolute freedom and thus becomes the urban absolute spirit. This absolute spirit unites sensibility and reason and breaks into the world alone, which is Hegel's theory of rational creation.

Although Feuerbach, who succeeded Hegel, criticized Hegel's philosophy as rationalized and modernized theology, he also raised the banner of rationalism and established his own philosophical thought system of humanism. Feuerbach's humanistic thought is mainly manifested in his affirmation of both the natural and social attributes of human beings, as well as the rationality and divinity of human beings. However, on the issue of human rationality and divinity, he loudly put forward the view that "the world is made by man who makes God, not by God who makes man". "Only that which is human is rational, and man is the measure of reason" "Thinking is a necessary consequence and attribute of man's nature", and the nature of God is the nature of man. But Feuerbach only regarded man as an abstract naturally existing class of beings, and did not reveal the true nature of man. If Hegel attaches importance to pure reason - the path of absolute spiritual development, then Feuerbach attaches importance to practical reason - the path of human rational development. Feuerbach's anthroposophy gave Marx great inspiration.

4. Value rationality and its significance in modern philosophy

In the 1830s, Western philosophy, marked by the end of Hegelian philosophy, began to reject metaphysics, oppose rationalism, and advocate the autonomy of human nature. Whether it is the philosophy of science, or the philosophy of human nature, up to contemporary philosophy, they all pay great attention to rationality, fully affirming the ethical and social value of rationality. According to Husserl, the nature of human nature lies in the pursuit of rationality, and the exaltation of the rational spirit of Europeans is the hope of saving European science and even the whole European civilization. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, the endowment of reason is wisdom, and reason is "dominating all our scientific abilities and all our activities", while human wisdom will never be satisfied with everything that is ready-made, and will always set up a goal for itself that can only be reached through human endeavor. Bertrand

Arthur William Russell has characterized himself as a rationalist, arguing that reason always retains the guiding idea and the full meaning of life that it has, and that instinct is the source of life, but above instinct there is the spirit, which is the principle of impersonal emotion. Jürgen Habermas put forward the rationality of interaction, aiming at eliminating the shortcomings of modern capitalist society through the reconstruction of the behavior of interaction and realizing a social order "free from violence and domination". According to him, "communicative rationality" can not only avoid the metaphysical rationality trap, but also has the intellectual sharpness of rational criticism. In *The Destruction of Reason*, Georg Lukács argues that "Fascist propaganda and tyranny are but the culmination of a long process, initially manifested as 'innocent': the destruction of reason." He explores the roots of the destruction of reason in the history of philosophical development and argues for the importance of reinventing the spirit of reason as "reflecting what is concrete and reasonable in a social situation or in a development trend, making it into a concept, and thus facilitating or inhibiting that which is concrete." Lukács's exposition of rationality is of positive significance in that it can reveal the inevitability of social history and promote the progress and development of human society.

In short, Western philosophy has always shone with the light of rationality, and one of the main threads connecting the theories and doctrines of Western philosophers is rationality. At this time of rapid development of science and technology, although we should not reject irrationality (such as imagination, emotion, will, faith, intuition, inspiration, epiphany, etc.), we must aim at realizing the comprehensive and free development of human beings, and promote the reasonable and sound rationality integrating scientific rationality and humanistic rationality, and the socialist core value system which is the dialectical unity of rationality and value.

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