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DISCUSSION ON PHILOSOPHY OF IMMANUEL KANT

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DISCUSSION ON PHILOSOPHY OF IMMANUEL KANT

by

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
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ABSTRACT

DISCUSSION ON PHILOSOPHY OF IMMANUEL KANT

TAN CHOW LING

Generally, the aim of this project is to discuss on the critiques carried out by Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), a German philosopher. The issues that I focus on are the philosophy and ethics of pure reason and practical reason. Based on Kant's arguments and conclusions, I've developed some theories as to make the existed theories more acceptable. From the analysis being done, I've found that Kant's philosophy is perhaps good in theory but still insufficient to be practiced in everyday life. This is because some of his theories demand too much of human nature that may not be thoroughly understood. Thus, I suggest to improve his theories and relate them to others' philosophy.

ABSTRAK

PERBINCANGAN TENTANG FALSAFAH IMMANUEL KANT

TAN CHOW LING

Pada umumnya, projek ini bertujuan untuk berbincang tentang kritik-kritik yang dibentangkan oleh seorang ahli falsafah German, iaitu Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804). Isu-isu yang diberi tumpuan ialah falsafah serta peradaban pure reason dan practical reason. Berdasarkan kesimpulan yang dibuat oleh Kant, saya telah membina beberapa teori untuk mengubahsuai teori-teori yang sedia ada. Daripada analisa yang telah dibuat, saya mendapati bahawa falsafah Kant terhadap peradaban adalah baik secara teori tetapi masih kekurangan untuk dipraktikkan dalam kehidupan seharian. Ini disebabkan sesetengah teori Kant amat bergantung kepada sifat asal manusia yang sukar difahami secara menyeluruh. Oleh yang demikian, saya bercadang agar teori Kant diperbaiki dan dikaitkan dengan falsafah lain.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives

The project is conducted in order to introduce and explore Kant's principal works in philosophy, especially of that concentrated on ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics of the Critiques. Some of the arguments and conclusions of Kant's philosophy might be modified as to make them more acceptable. This attempt will be a beneficial exercise in the philosophy of mind. Meanwhile, the project is also trying to discuss on how certain structures of Kant's philosophy can be related to others' philosophy.

1.2 Kant's Background

In order to understand Kant as a great German philosopher, it is important to understand the philosophical background that he is reacting to. According to Eberts (n.d.), there are two major historical movements in the early modern period of philosophy that have a significant impact on Kant. These two movements are empiricism and rationalism. Kant's philosophical goal is to use logical analysis to understand reason itself. Kant argues that one must understand the mental tools that will be used before analyzing the world.

Kant's philosophy can be presented through his writings. His most famous works include Critique of Pure Reason, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, and Critique of Practical Reason. Kant believes that every event has a specific and determinate cause. This

will mean that all events can be explained in terms of cause and effect. In addition, he concludes that human beings experience the sense of moral duty and possess freedom in their behavior.

Overall, I've distinguished Kant's philosophy under his background, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of Pure Reason. Each of them is interdependence in terms of their principles. They can not be separated as Kant's answer to his philosophy can only be found through his whole works.

1.2.1 Kant's Life

Immanuel Kant was born on April 22, 1724 in Königsberg, East Prussia. He spent all of his seventy-nine years in this small town. According to Brenner (1989), although Kant came from a poor family, he was a devout follower of the pietistic community. His religious spirit was nurtured by the Lutheran belief that stressing immortality of the soul, love, worship, good works, purity of heart, and the existence of God.

Kant was a "rationalist" influenced by Leibniz (1646-1716) in 1750s. From about 1762, his thought was influenced by the skeptical of David Hume (1711-1776). The others described Kant's pre-critical work as an exploration of "natural philosophy". According to Michael Friedman, Kant was influenced by Newtonian physics and tried to mediate it with Leibniz's metaphysics.

Kant's education began at the local Collegium Fredericianum. At age sixteen, Kant entered the University of Königsberg. According to Beck (1988), Kant did not register as a student in one of the faculties. The reason was that he did not want to be proficient in just a specific field but he attended lectures in almost all the faculties where the fields were on Mathematics, philosophy, physics, theology, medicine, and classical Latin literature. The teacher who led Kant was a philosopher of Leibniz-Wolffian school, Martin Knutzen (1715 – 1751). Knutzen introduced Wolffian philosophy and Newtonian physics to Kant that played an important role in the development of Kant's critical philosophy.

After completing his university course in 1746, Kant worked as a family tutor for the next eight years. In 1755, his first philosophical work, *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, qualified him for becoming what was called a *Privatdozent* (which referred to lecturer) in the University of Königsberg. As a *Privatdozent*, Kant received only the fees paid by his students as his salary. He taught on various subjects, such as logic, physics, geography, metaphysics, Mathematics, anthropology, ethics, and the theory of fortifications especially for military officers. In order to earn a living, he lectured more than twenty hours per week. In 1762, Kant was deeply attracted by the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which were *Émile* and *Social Contract*. He then tried to compare Rousseau with Newton. Accordingly, Rousseau influenced Kant a lot, not only gave him a guide to his ethical theory, but also changed his philosophy of life.

Kant was having a transition in 1770. In this year, he was appointed professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University. He tended to dismiss his pre-critical philosophy and declared "Inaugural Dissertation" (the first critical work of Kant) that written based on a

public lecture given while he was a lecturer at University ("Pre-critical" describes Kant's philosophy before the "Inaugural Dissertation" of 1770). The next ten years were considered "silent years" for Kant. However, during this period, Kant was preparing for his subsequent works. The period of time from 1781 to 1790 was a critical period for Kant. He continued his contribution after his pre-critical writings from 1749 to 1768. A view demonstrated that in 1794, Kant was ordered by the Prussian King to refrain from further writing on religion because of his unorthodox religious views (Castell, Borchert, & Zurker, 1994). Kant obeyed to the King until the King died in 1797. Kant said that:

"To withdraw or deny one's inner conviction is base, but to be silent in a case like this is a duty of a subject [to his sovereign]; and though everything that one says must be true, it is not one's duty also to say openly all the truth."

Kant retired from teaching in 1796. He became gradually lost his eyesight and strength. He died at the age of seventy-nine on February 12, 1804. Although Kant's personal life was quiet uneventful, but he was successful as a lecturer and well known throughout Germany for his writings.

1.2.2 Kant's Works

Kant's early studies were focused on the areas of natural science, Mathematics and philosophy. In the year when Kant left the University of Königsberg, he had completed his first work, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*. It was a work that mediated

between the Cartesian and Leibnizian theories of physical forces. This writing was published in 1749 and therefore, began Kant's pre-critical writings.

According to Wolff (1992), Kant was well known throughout Germany for his writings in astronomy, physics, philosophy and metaphysics. When he returned to University in 1755, he had completed several works. The one that published in 1755 was *General Natural History and The Theory of the Heavens*. According to Paul Guyer (1998), "Kant argued for the nebular hypothesis and the origin of solar system out of a nebular mass by purely mechanical means". In the same year, Kant had published another work called *A New Education of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*. This was the work that earned him as a *Privatdozent*.

In the following year, Kant published *Physical Monadology* and after that did not publish any work. Started from 1762 to 1768, he entered unusually productive activity, publishing his other works: *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures* (1762), *The Only Possible Argument in support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763), *Observations on the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* (1764), *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766), and *Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space* (1768).

For ten years (1770-1780), Kant published nothing. This so-called "silent years" ended with the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. *Critique of Pure Reason* was one of his major works that emphasized on epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of

mind. During the last twenty-five years of his life (1780-1804), he had published a lot of books and essays. Some of his major works include *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), which was a different version of Kant's epistemology and metaphysics. His other works were *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784), *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), which was a survey of *a priori* principles of moral judgement. *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences* (1786), *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd Edition (1787), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), an investigation of moral philosophy were also published. In 1790, Kant published an analysis of aesthetic and art called *Critique of Judgement*, *Religion within the Limit of Reason Alone* in 1793, *Towards Perpetual Peace* in 1795, *Metaphysics of Moral* in 1797, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* in 1798 and *Logic* in 1800.

1.2.3 Kant's Thought

According to Kant, philosophy is made up of the four main questions: "What can I know?", "What ought I to do?", "What am I hoping for?", and "What is man?".

When philosophers deal with the concept of knowledge, they are not just concerning about what is the case, but also have an insight into why it is the case and why it can not be otherwise. There are two major historical movements in the early modern period of philosophy that have a significant impact on Kant, which are rationalism and empiricism. Both of these paradigms deal with problem in determining how we can escape from the boundary of human mind and the immediately knowable content of our own thoughts to

acquire knowledge of the world outside us. In other words, Kant's aim is to mediate between the epistemological claims of Rationalists, like Descartes and Wolff, and the Empiricists, like Hume and Locke.

The controversy between these two movements is whether knowledge is *a priori*, which means deriving from reason alone and that it is certain, or whether some knowledge is *a posteriori*, which arises from sense perception. According to Flew (1989), rationalism emphasizes the relation of ideas to each other and therefore has no clear connection with things as they really are. In addition, rationalism can not produce the kind of knowledge represented by Newtonian physics. As a result, the metaphysical speculations about reality beyond experience are doctrinaire. According to McCormick (2001), rationalists believe that *a priori* reasoning can be used to approach the problem of human knowledge through an analysis of ideas and derivations done through logic.

A German philosopher, Christian Wolff, argues that all knowledge has to be proven by the law of contradiction. We should be able to show a false statement to be self-contradictory. Wolff acknowledges that human always fail to constitute the truth by showing the self-contradictoriness of its contradictory. This is because human mind can see nothing self-contradictory in most false judgements. Kant has also come to doubt the claims of the Rationalists because of contradictory (McCormick, 2001). Kant claims that the contradictory can be resolved if we understand the domain of the faculties that produce knowledge. Since our knowledge is subject to the conditions of experience, we must realize that something can't be known when they are in themselves. *A priori* reasoning of our ideas make us aware of our

ideas. However, it can not give a coherent demonstration of metaphysical truths about the external world.

At the same time, the Empiricists attempt to use a posteriori reasoning to handle the problem of human knowledge. According to McCormick (2001), the Empiricists argue that human knowledge originated in the sensations. Hume, for instance, has an argument that we can not have any knowledge of “causality” since all our knowledge come from experience. “Causality”, according to Hume, is the association of two events that we have experienced. However, we can not conclude that both of these events are connected objectively. Moreover, we do not experience causality. Therefore, we can not predict any future event from our experience. And yet, the outcome assumes that our knowledge of some events in present give us reliable knowledge about other similar events in the future. As for Kant, he is dissatisfies with the skepticism of empiricism and the dogmatism of rationalism.

In Kant’s writing, there is not an exact answer that can be found to answer the question of “What is man?”. However, the answer is approximately presented in his whole works. Beck (1988) says that, in Kant’s point of view, ‘man’ can be described in various ways. Kant describes ‘man’ as mystery, finite, creator, and as a being of infinite value.

According to Eberts (n.d.), Kant is facing a problem in the use of language. He tries to invent German philosophical phrase for some Latin terms and give new meanings to those old words. However, Kant does not define these words until the flaw raises several problems in his moral philosophy. In defining “what is man”, Kant recommends “freedom” to describe the different between man and animal, which as cited by Flew (1971):

"men derive their worth from freedom, the characteristic which essentially distinguishes man from any other creature in nature."

At this point, men have the ability to act from reason and physical causes. The explanation is enhanced by the concept of morality. According to Kant, the morality includes the concept of freedom. That is the source freedom derived from. According to Earle (1992),

"Morality makes sense only if men are free: freedom is just the ability to act from reasons; thus, morality will make sense only if it grounded on rationality".

Freedom has played a central role in Kant's ethics. This is because the moral judgements presuppose the concept of freedom. Reason can not act without the assumption of freedom because it is very important to the practical function (McCormick, 2001). Therefore, reason is strongly related in thinking of itself as free. According to Beck (1988), something occurs can be understood if the reason can be explained.

"The unconditioned cannot be comprehended, but we can comprehend its incomprehensibility." (Beck, 1988, p.22)

We do not know why our intuition is sensible to the things in universal and perceive them in terms of reasons and effects. Only the God can know these. Thus, men can not be understood and explained.

In Kant's ethical writings, he raises a theory that man can obey laws and yet be free by involving in the law-making process. He calls the conception as autonomy. Kant argues that man is not only the executor but also the legislator of the moral law. According to Beck

(1988), Kant has described the creative role of man in his passages. One of the illustrations is taken from the *Idea for a Universal History* (p. 417):

"Nature has willed that man should, by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should partake of no other happiness or perfection than that which he himself, independently of instinct, has created by his own reason."

In other words, man is a creator of culture. Another illustration quotes that man is a creator of art who is genius and gives the rule to art (p. 381). In short, man is a creator in nature. Although creation is said may produce rules, it does not follow the rules stated by some other metaphysical being.

According to Beck (1988),

"The narrow limits of human creativity are set by things as they are in themselves" (p. 22).

From this point, we can make another conclusion that man is finite. We have knowledge in our mind. However, not all knowledge is a priori. Eventually, some mindless a posteriori facts are the knowledge that man does not create. Man does not create anything they want because man is not a god. Meanwhile, Kant also suggests that man is a being of infinite value. In supporting this statement, he looks at the cause and the goal of all things. He claims that since the cause of something is not included in our experience, therefore we can not find it or know what it is. He has first emphasized that there is the boundary of experience and knowledge. On the other hand, the goal of all things, which is similarly to future event, is likewise unknowable. This is because the end of all things will be at a boundary of knowledge. However, it is found that a teleological world does not set up a teleological

system unless the goal of all goals are taken collectively (Beck, 1988). Thus, man is a being of infinite worth.

Based on Kant's ethical theory, Kant considers an ordinary human being is a person who can differentiate very clearly between good and vicious. He relates the actions carried out by these rational beings to his theory of reason. Hence, his answer to the question of "what ought I to do?" is to act and think rationally. According to Kant,

"Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of law."

In other words, only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to principles, as instance. This capacity is defined as a will as we have a specific goal to be accomplished in the attempt of control our behavior. Meanwhile, rational beings use the conception of a law to guide their behavior.

Another role played in accomplishing a purpose is the ability to predict consequences of actions, keep them in a set of potential alternatives, and select among them in terms of reasons or causes. This ability refers to practical reason, as called by Aristotle. Thus, Kant identifies that will and reason is interrelated. However, said Aristotle, practical reason does not lead directly to action, but just guides to satisfy a need. Most philosophers agree that its rational conception of causal connections prompted a person to take actions, which may lead to the desired states. In general, the reason of the thing we ought to do is based on our previous experience, that implies a constraint, or in what Kant calls categorical imperative. Actually, the categorical imperative commands a law that forms the basis of particular actions. It applies to all rational beings and it is the principle on which we ought to act.

Kant's thinking was vividly expressed through moral laws and logic. However, as compared to the world today, there will be some arguments that are neither realistic nor practical. According to Kant, both of the components in life, hope and belief, are intimately related. One may believe something but not necessary hope for it. If one chooses to hope for something, he has to believe it. For example, although one believes that there are something given by God, but he may not hope for it. In contrast, when he hopes for the gifts and appreciate them, he must believe the existence of God. This argument brings to the term, what is called by Kant, the rational beliefs. A belief is rational if it has the potential of completing the structure of its knowledge, which is subjective in supporting certainty of the knowledge. What one ought to do to accomplish a hope begins from a rational belief. In other words, hoping draws the conclusion that something is because something ought to happen. As a result, hope tends to produce beliefs and influence upon behavior.

Kant believes that hope is always directed to happiness. In my point of view, it is unrealistic since one may believe about all manners of things, and there will be no limits.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review

It is not easy for us to understand Kant's thought and illustrate his sentences. Even some of the philosophers have to modify and reconstruct his arguments in order to make them more accurate. As in his Critiques, one should try to relate his principles and methods before proceeding to deeper concepts. According to Beck (1993), the Critiques followed the synthetic method. What it meant was that it began with principles and then the experiences so that the philosophical knowledge presented all its articulations. Additionally, according to Beck (1988), the best access to the Critique of Pure Reason, based on previous experience and experiment, was through the *Inaugural Dissertation*; while for the access to the Critique of Practical Reason, an easier starting point for the readers was the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

There always arises a common misunderstanding about the titles of Kant's first two Critiques, which are Critique of Pure Reason and Critique of Practical Reason. Some of us may think that there must be a contrast between pure and practical reason. This is not true. According to Beck (1993), for Critique of Practical Reason, the term *practical reason*, is originated by Aristotle. It is a name for what is commonly known as *the will*. Whereas the purpose of Critique of Pure Reason is to examine human reason and concludes that it is capable of constructing science but not metaphysics. Actually, these two critiques are

interrelated with each other. Kant is trying to show that pure reason can be practical. In other words, Kant tries to show that there are elements of a priori in will.

As stated by Smith (1933),

"But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience" (pp. 41-43).

Thus, the world can be perceived differently from the world as we know it. According to Strawson (1966), it was possible to describe types of experience very different from the experience we actually have. In his essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, there existed limits to what we could conceive of, or make intelligible to ourselves, as a possible general structure of experience. Evidently, these limits have been investigated.

According to Ziniewicz (1996), there was a difference between the way things are in themselves and the way things appear to us. In other words, we cannot know things as they really are in themselves, but only know them as appearances. This was because human knowledge was a process that included both perception and understanding. As what had meant by Smith, everyone perceived the world differently than what it actually was.

2.2 Methodology

In this project, the methodologies that have been applied are library research and Internet resources. After acquiring that available information about my topic, I have to think critically and logically to make those philosophical theories more acceptable. Critical

analysis is necessary so that I can induce or deduce inferences from the theories that have already existed.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION ON PURE REASON

3.1 Introduction to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason

Critique of Pure Reason is an attempt that tries to make a thorough inquiry of human knowledge. As is known to all, rationalism and empiricism are the two philosophical movements that show a different concern with the origin of knowledge. The knowing process claimed by empiricists and rationalists can be described through the metaphor of today's information processing technology. The empiricists concern about the "input data" while the rationalists concern about the "process". At this point, Kant argues that both of these species of philosophy should be mediated. The aim of his critique is to investigate whether the assumptions of passive or active mind contribute to the knowing process. Kant affirms that knowledge has its origin in experience. However, he qualifies this by saying that there is a priori to all knowing. Since there are still assumptions saying that the mind is passive and have something to be turned into ideas only when sensation occurs. In addition, it can not generate the operation of knowing process, Kant takes the chance to argue that the mind is actually plays an active role in this knowing process. Based on Kant's ideas, the mind is considered active because it organizes principles that have made the knowledge of something as objects possible. Hence, he argues that there are two types of knowledge that involve in the knowing process. They are called a priori and a posteriori.

According to Kant, a priori is knowledge that absolutely independent from all experience. It is generated by human mind. On the other hand, a posteriori is knowledge that