On Feng Youlan’s Perception and the Meaning of Life

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Abstract

In 20th century China, the ancient and modern Chinese and foreign philosophical thoughts are flowing like a flood, and they also compete with each other, collision and run-in. Feng Youlan, after systematically studying the domestic and foreign philosophical thoughts, is committed to borrowing the western philosophical form and combining with the essence of China's excellent traditional philosophy, so as to make his own contribution to the turn of Chinese traditional modernity. In Feng Youlan's thought system, he takes perception as the fundamental basis, absorbs and draws on the excellent ideas of ancient and modern times at home and abroad, and establishes a set of knowledge system about cognitive synthesis, the foundation of this system consists of two parts, namely "awareness" and "acquaintance", which complement each other. The consequences, on the one hand, can be traced back to people themselves, which affirms the existence of people and also carries out deep reflection on people. On the other hand, it is to rise from it to different realms of morality. In today's era, multi-faceted information, and knowledge diversification are becoming more and more obvious, and it still faces problems such as the establishment and improvement of knowledge system and value system. Mr. Feng's thoughts are still of great value to us.

Keywords

Perception, Knowledge, Man

1. Introduction

All the things and things that exist in the world and people have their meaning of existence. It itself contains knowledge. What people do is only to discover, discover, organize and integrate knowledge. This knowledge can be understood as the inherent properties of things, and the world is a world full of knowledge. This meaning also with the meaning in our daily life is different: the meaning of daily life refers to the positive effect, as we know, a thing or an event or its evolution must with various influence, according to the most rough division method, generally divided into positive and negative, people often say that the meaning of reality is refers to the positive side. And what we mean here has a broader connotation. It includes the existence of a thing or a thing, that is, "however"; their existence is somehow associated with the other thing, that is, "so"; their existence inevitably produces or brings some results, including both positive results and negative effects; their existence and other things or things. For a thing, different people will have different views, even if the same person, in different periods will also have different views. The reason for the difference, Mr. Feng thinks, is because people feel differently. And "perception" should be divided into "awareness" and "acquaintance", each of which has its own meaning.

2. A person benefits from "awareness"

"Awareness" is self-consciousness, that is, when we do something we are aware of the act itself, without refer-
ence to the content of our action. In a certain sense, "awareness" is also a kind of "acquaintance", but the object of "acquaintance" is not the object of "awareness", but "awareness" itself. For example, when I am thinking about Du Fu's poems at the moment, I realize that I have achieved "awareness" by thinking at the moment, and what I have achieved by appreciating Du Fu's poems specifically is "acquaintance". Different from "acquaintance", "awareness" is a mental state of human beings. Everyone can achieve awareness without the grasp of concepts, while "acquaintance" requires the help of concepts, experience and knowledge.

Is awareness useless to knowledge because it does not require the use of concepts? Self-awareness alone obviously does not add to the content of knowledge, but self-awareness is meaningful and necessary. Nihilists have long believed that in today's complicated and dazzling world, which is full of contingency and uncertainty, the past history is meaningless, people in the present have become blind, and where we should go in the future is naturally unknown. However, human existence is not only the continuation of a simple species following biological rules, but also an objective subject based on cognitive activities. This cognitive activity is inseparable from self-awareness. Self-awareness is mental activity and thought, and thought itself is uncertain, it can only represent a certain possibility, but it is because of such possibility that people appear great and become infinite. Although awareness does nothing to increase knowledge, it is an important means of understanding thought itself.

And the thought itself, Descartes says, all the knowledge that comes from the thought is uncertain, it can be doubted, except the thought itself and the person who is the suspect. So Descartes concludes that "I think, therefore I am" (Fritz Peter Joseph, 2020). Both Descartes' I think and Feng's awareness have reflective consciousness. But Descartes' aim is to find an unquestionable first principle -- thought, so as to construct a new metaphysical system. Feng's purpose is to emphasize the particularity of man, and "awareness" is the key to distinguish man from animals (Zhou Yong, 2020).

3. Understand the "acquaintance" of behavioral content or object

The meaning of a thing is the connection between the thing and the person. At one end is the nature of the thing itself, the possible purpose, the possible consequence, the relationship with other things, etc., and at the other end is the person, that is, the person's knowledge, living environment, purpose, attention and even emotion and emotion character. A thing is meaningful when people know about it, and it has some effect on people.

3.1 No acquaintance

There are many degrees of acquaintance. The first is "no acquaintance", that is, the thing outside me has no effect on me, I do not realize it is a thing, a thing is meaningless to me. All my experience of it is just a chaos to me, not knowing its kind, not to mention its reason. For example, when an air raid siren goes off and people are running frantically to a place, a dog on the side of the road sees people running and runs with them. But actually the dog doesn't know why he's running, doesn't think about why, the air raid alarm doesn't mean anything to him, and there's no knowledge, that is, no acquaintance. It just "follows the crowd, doesn't know what to say".

3.2 Understanding of the largest "class" and "reason"

The second is the lowest "acquaintance" in Mr. Feng's opinion, that is, to understand what class this thing belongs to (the largest class) and understand the reason expressed by this class. "Class" is to observe and pay attention to this thing, but also need to combine with the accumulation of previous experience. Let's say I see something out the window: it's tall, it's got a big trunk, and it's got a couple of branch on top, and branches with green blades that move with the wind. . . From that, the first thing I know is that it's a tree. Behind reason lies concept. "Reason" is generally hidden behind things (Xiaoqing Diana Lin, 2016), which requires inductive abstraction of "class". For example, after I saw this tree, I learned what characteristics can be called a tree, such as the shape of the tree, the characteristics of the leaves, the changing characteristics of the seasons, and the environmental requirements required for growth. The deeper the grasp of "reason", the deeper the degree of acquaintance.

3.3 The acquaintance reached by the coincidence of knowledge and experience of famous sayings

The knowledge of a famous quote is the knowledge of a thing, thing, feeling, etc., and does not correspond to the object in reality (Li Jinglin, 2011). The knowledge of a famous sayings is generally learned from elsewhere, such as a person reading "A smoke hangs straight on the desert vast, and a sun sits round on the endless stream", only to hear the teachers and classmates said this is how magnificent, glorious and sad beauty, but he has never seen the
real scenery that outside the books. At best, he can only appreciate the beauty of rhythm and structure of the poem as well as the beauty of lines and even colors of the picture. And only when you personally see this magnificent vast reality scene, will suddenly understand, only with what they have learned to be confirmed.

The third kind of "acquaintance" can also be compared with the "格物致知", that is, knowledge is acquired thought experience to investigate things is to attain knowledge. Simply put, both of them are to achieve the conformity of "class" and "reason", so as to reach the level of "knowledge". But the two approaches are quite different: Mr. Feng's "acquaintance" is to first acquire a concept, namely "knowledge of famous sayings", and then when encountering the corresponding experience, "knowledge of famous sayings" is verified with the experience, achieving unity and internalization. On the contrary, the “格物致知" starts from things, starts from experience, and then realizes "enlightenment" from "things".

Due to the limitation of time and region in our daily life and study, we naturally use more of Mr. Feng's method, but it also has many shortcomings: One is that there are many "famous knowledge" has been difficult to really find the corresponding experience, such as feudal autocracy, primitive people, dinosaurs, and so on, we can only through some words, fossils and other indirect way to understand them. Take the Grand Canyon, for example. Even if we can use some modern technology to take us "there", but understanding it is absolutely different from our actual experience there. The other is that some "famous knowledge" does not fully correspond to the real world experience, such as morality, good, evil, love, the world, time, space, etc. For example, in general, if someone asks what is moral, the answer can only be vague or can only be illustrated by example. The third is that we acquire "famous knowledge" in different ways, with different results and even mistakes, which brings some obstacles to our communication and a lot of uncertainty to the acquired knowledge.

To the “格物致知", there are also limitations: one is that, according to the "knowledge" that "knowing" one thing, our lifetime time is limited, and the "knowledge" we can obtain is extremely limited, especially in the rapid development of today's era, this is not very favorable. Second, there is no specific methodology for how something should be "know", so when we encounter something, "know" may be difficult to proceed. Third, even if a person "gets" the object, it is easy for him or her to have a gap in content or degree with others due to the influence of knowledge, experience, ability, character, emotion, and other subject-object factors, so it is difficult for him or her to obtain a criterion for "knowledge".

3.4 Fully acquaintance

The fourth is the highest degree of understanding, that is, "殊胜解", that is, fully acquaintance. However, the "fully acquaintance" can only exist in theory and is impossible in reality. The reason is: First of all, the reason why a thing is presented as this thing often contains many attributes or properties of things. The composition of things is extremely complex and diverse. When presented in front of our eyes, only some dominant properties are shown, and the properties shown are usually just the tip of the iceberg. Some properties are also easier to mask or even change. Secondly, things are also easy to change. In different time and space, things are also easy to show different states due to the change of nature. These are the complexities of things themselves.

The third is human complexity. When it comes to "acquaintance", the inevitable subject can only be human, animals will not produce "acquaintance". People are more complex than things. As an entity, people are definitely objective and definite, but for all the existing things in the world, people are special, subjective and random, with rich imagination, unlimited creativity and complex emotions… It is the unity of finitude and infinity. People cannot be absolutely objective and neutral in the face of a thing, such as the "cheerful" bird song outside the window. But in fact, birdsong is just a signal of communication among the same species, which has some similarity with human language. However, "I", as their different species, cannot hear whether "happy" or "sad" from it. And whether they have the ability and emotion of "happy" or "sad" remains to be studied. I heard the word "cheerful" simply because of the light rhythm of the bird's voice and the emotion I was feeling at the moment. In short, the "cheerful" birdsong outside the window is given to the bird by "I", and has nothing to do with the objective "intention" and "content" of the bird's singing.

The fourth is the complexity of the relationship between things and people. The first prerequisite for an association with something or someone is that the person is paying attention to it, or that the thing or thing has attracted the person's attention. For example, I walk into a classroom, randomly find a place to put down my bag and sit down. When I put my bag on the desk, I noticed some characteristics of the desk, such as size, color, material and so on. But in fact, there is not only this desk in this classroom, but also blackboard, computer, Windows, walls. . . Even
classmates, but I only noticed the desk I was using. In this way, I have established the most general connection with this table, which is the second kind of "acquaintance" mentioned above. My association with this object is not limited to this. For example, when I get up, I hit my ankle on the leg of the table, and the pain was unbearable. I immediately looked at the table and was filled with disgust, and the table became a "dangerous" for me again. But when I look at the table this way, it actually deepens my connection to the table.

4. Summary and reflection for perception

The above four kinds of "acquaintances" are progressive. The degree of "acquaintances" is gradually deepened, and the knowledge about the outside world is gradually increased. But is there something that we cannot know? In Mr. Feng's plane attained theory, the things in the realm of the same heaven are what we cannot understand. The reason why we cannot understand them is that they are not understood, they are beyond understanding, and they are above our experience. In fact, there is some understanding, but the object we understand is itself "transcendent" (Li Jinglin, 2009). However, just because it is impossible to understand does not mean it is unimportant and meaningless. As a person, not only people in the finite world, but also people in the infinite world, people in the cosmic sense, people in heaven and earth, also need to "serve the heaven". Although it is impossible to understand, it does not prevent us from taking them as the ultimate goal of our pursuit and efforts. In contrast, there is no knowledge, that is, on the premise that the object we know is real, we know little or nothing about the object, or even whether the object exists. In contrast, high and low now stand out.

Perception is the fundamental mark that distinguishes humans from animals. Only humans have awareness, animals don't. Perception has two important roles: one is the understanding and recovery of knowledge. Why is "recovery"? Because knowledge exists, knowledge does not need to be invented, only discovered. The second is to emphasize the ability and meaning of people themselves for human being as a unique existence in the world. The subject of "perception" must be human, "awareness" means having consciousness of the subject's behavior or activity itself, while "acquaintance" means having understanding of the object or content of the subject's behavior or activity, and this object or content is meaningful to the subject. Thus, "perception" becomes a bridge between the subject and the object, and people can grasp the existing knowledge again. Because "perception is the elimination of ignorance", people and the world are not "ignorance" in nature, which is meaningful and knowledgeable, but not the re-establishment of "knowledge". The purpose of "perception" is just to reveal this "knowledge". It is worth noting that what Mr. Feng pays more attention to is not the mastery and understanding of knowledge, knowledge is not the purpose, knowledge is just a means or a stage, a part, what people really want to realize is people themselves, people's existence itself is the purpose, "knowledge" is to "understand" people themselves.

Starting from perception, Mr. Feng analyzed four kinds of moral behavior according to the different degrees of people's perception, which also correspond to the four realms of nature, utility, morality and heaven and earth. This also provides a new path for moral judgment and moral evaluation: our mainstream evaluation criteria, when judging whether and to what extent an action is ethical, mainly look at the result of the action; But according to Feng's understanding, we should not simply judge by the result, but by the extent to which the actor perceives the meaning of the action. It also makes up for the rigid part of mainstream ethics, and can more carefully reflect the differences in behavioral motives of actors rather than binary opposition, which is also a more suitable and rich moral value thought with Chinese characteristics. However, according to Mr. Feng's standard, some problems will also exist or arise: consciousness itself is quite complicated, and human behavior is also complicated. If only consciousness is used as the criterion and principle of action, it will be difficult to achieve its purpose. But we should not deny Mr. Feng's contribution as a great philosopher because of the limitations of some theories. In Hegel's opinion, "Philosophy is always too late anyway. Philosophy, as thought about the world, does not appear until reality has finished its formative process and completed itself. What the concept teaches is necessarily what history presents."

References


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