

The Reform and Development of Practice View Based on Philosophical History View

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Abstract: *The practical point of view is a primary and basic point of view in Marxist philosophy. Practical philosophy has run a long course in the history of philosophy. Since Aristotle initiated Western practical philosophy, two opposing traditions of practical philosophy have been formed, namely, the moral practice theory and the technical practice theory. Although it has been sublated and developed by such philosophers as Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach, it has always been with certain defects such as abstraction, one-sidedness, and metaphysics. On the basis of critically inheriting the reasonable connotation of practice concepts in traditional philosophy, in Marx's practice view, he took labor as the core, understood the nature and living conditions of humans through labor, and established the relationship between humans and the world through practice. It resolved the traditional subject-object opposition and the opposition of thinking and existence. It has surpassed predecessors' practical philosophy in four aspects: question orientation, existence field, thinking mode and value purport, thus completing a fundamental change in the history of philosophy.*

Keywords: *practical philosophy, Marx's concept of practice, labor, revolutionary change*

1. Two opposing traditions of practical philosophy

Practice is not only a term widely used in daily life, but also a well-known philosophical concept. As early as the ancient Greek period, people was already using the word practice. Practice was originally used to refer to all movements, and it was not a specific philosophical concept. Aristotle clearly put forward the concept of practice for the first time in the history of philosophy and initiated the tradition of moral practice theory. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle divided human activities into three categories: theory, practice and creation. Theory refers to the ideological activities of people exploring the universal laws of nature; practice mainly refers to ethical and political activities, especially the moral activities of interpersonal communication; creation is the production activity of material means of life, mainly referring to the productive labor of slaves. Among them, theory takes the immutable things as the object, while the objects of practice and creation are changeable. In Aristotle's view, practice and creation were completely different. Practice took itself as the goal[1], and the realization of "goodness" as the ultimate pursuit; creation took products as the goal, and what it wanted to achieve was the "goodness" of products[1]. Creation existed as a means of practice[2], and creation and practice were opposed here.

Beginning with the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas, creation and practice were gradually confused. With the development of natural sciences, Bacon criticized the tradition of despising natural philosophy and attaching importance to moral philosophy and political philosophy since ancient Greece. He added the factor of creation to the connotation of practice, that is, the craftsman's craftsmanship and the experiment and cognition of nature, thus he carried out a technical understanding of practice, and regarded practice as an operable and utilitarian activity. Thus, practice was gradually understood as the application of science and technology, losing its ethical significance and the transcendent dimension of morality.

Bacon believed that practice fell into two types, one being mechanics under physics, and the other being so-called illusion under metaphysics[2]. He agreed with the former practice, thinking that it was a practice that could produce utility, and he regarded utility as the fundamental attribute of practice. Bacon pointed out: "Speaking of which, the scientific, real, and legal goal is nothing more than this, to give new discoveries and new powers to human life." In advocating natural sciences and emphasizing individuals' pursuit of material interests and happiness, Bacon created the tradition of technical practice theory, which then led to the dispute between moral practice theory and technical practice theory.

The dispute between the moral practice theory and the technical practice theory also brought about a terminology dispute, that is, the distinction between "praxis" with an ethical meaning and "practice" with a technical meaning. Some modern Western scholars attempted to distinguish between the two in terms, using the former to refer to human practice activities, and the latter to describe humans' general experience activities. This distinction makes various activities in different fields stand against one another, separates the totality of practice and dispels the integrity of human beings. Therefore, it is urgent to realize the transcendence of the two opposing traditions of practical philosophy, so as to fully understand humans' practical activities.

2. The practice view of classical German philosophy

Since modern times, the focus of philosophy has turned to the issue of epistemology, advocating that theory is superior to practice and even that theory should be divorced from practice, until Kant re-established the importance of practice. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant divided philosophy into the theoretical part as natural philosophy and the practical part as moral philosophy, believing that theoretical reason and practical reason were the same kind of reason, but in opposite directions. The former started from the sense, stayed at the principles, solved the problem of cognition, and belonged to the world of phenomena; while the latter started from the principles, entered the sense through the concepts, and solved the problem of action. Since action came from will, and will came from mind, the latter belonged to the realm of ontology[2]. On this basis, Kant further put forward the view that practice was superior to theory.

In Kant's point of view, human practice activities fell into two types, namely, practice following the concept of nature and practice following the concept of freedom. Kant pointed out: "If the concept ruling causality is a concept of nature, these principles are technically practice; but if it is a concept of freedom, these principles are morally practiced." Kant advocated the second practice, believing that only in moral practice could reason only accept the absolute commands of reason itself without being at the mercy of experience, so it was free. However, whether it is theoretical reason and practical reason, or practice following the concept of nature and practice following the concept of freedom, Kant confined them to the subjective world of man, which brought about the binary opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, subject and object, phenomenon world and ontology world.

Hegel inherited and developed the practical philosophy of his predecessors, believing that idea was the essence and ultimate basis of the world, that the abstract and universal idea must undergo externalized practice so as to achieve the unity of subject and object. He believed: "The purpose is combined with objectivity through means, and with itself in objectivity.[3]" Since all things that existed and the process of development were the external manifestations of theories, in Hegel's point of view, practical activities were no longer limited to a certain field such as morality or political activities, but involved all aspects of existence. At the same time, for the first time, Hegel connected productive labor with the nature of human beings, elevating the concept of labor explained by national economists to a philosophical category. He regarded labor as the essence of human beings and fully explained the important role of labor for human liberation and self-development. It was labor that enabled the enslaved ones to regain a self-awareness.

However, due to the limitations of his own idealist philosophy system, Hegel abstractly developed the active aspect of consciousness. He separated the spirits and concepts belonging to human beings and turned them into absolute spirits and concepts. The labor he spoke of was but abstract and spiritual labor. He did not understand labor as a realistic human perceptual activity, but attributed human initiative and creativity to absolute spiritual activity and creativity, not understanding the actual practical activity itself and its meaning. For that reason, Hegel's view of practice failed to resolve the binary opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, subject and object.

After Hegel, from a standpoint of materialism, Feuerbach divided human activities into theoretical ones and practical ones, and criticized Hegel's idealistic view of practice based on perceptual and realistic existence. Feuerbach emphasized: "I cannot admit that perceptual things were derived from spiritual things, and likewise I cannot admit that nature was derived from gods. For without perceptual things or outside of the perceptual things, the spiritual things are nothing; the spirit is nothing but the sublimation and the essence of the senses. [4]" Although Feuerbach emphasized the existence of real man and reality, since he regarded sensibility as the first principle, he only regarded theoretical activities as real activities of man, believing that "only theories reveal the magnificence of the world", and understanding practice as business-for-profit activities and eating and drinking activities driven by the desire for self-interest, which greatly devalued the role of practical activities. Feuerbach did not

understand that practice was the way of human existence, and believed that human beings were a perceptual object instead of a perceptual activity. He only understood the world from the perspective of the object, but did not grasp the world from the perspective of the subject and practice. In its essence, this was still an idealistic view of practice.

3. The fundamental revolution of Marx's view of practice in the history of philosophy

3.1 Question orientation: from speculative ethics to practical activities in reality

Marx was against abstract speculative philosophy. In his view, "anything that leads theory to mysticism can be reasonably solved in human practice and understanding of this practice." Marx regarded practice as the core. On the one hand, he allowed practice to cover all areas of the social life of man; on the other hand, Marx pointed out that human beings were essentially practical beings and could not be self-sufficient in their own object activities. Therefore, whether it is the subject or the object of practice, both must be based on the existence of the other. Marx understood and grasped the real world from the perspective of the interaction between man and nature, subject and object in real activities, and understood the nature of the world from the concrete and perceptual practice of material production. He regarded the all-round development of man as the ultimate goal, established the relationship between man and the world through practice, thus solving the traditional binary opposition between subject and object and that between thinking and existence.

3.2 The field of existence: replacement of the category of "politics" with the category of "society"

Marx believed that human beings were social animals, and political revolutions were not thorough revolutions. The establishment of a bourgeois democracy is without any doubt a great progress compared to feudal rule, but it is not a general form of "human liberation", and capitalist democracy is not the ultimate destination of human society. "Politically declaring private property invalid not only does not abolish private property, but instead presupposes private property." Political emancipation only separates civil society from the political state. Although it has politically abolished the existence of hierarchy and differences, since private property continues to exist and only a few people in civil society own the property, social and de facto hierarchy and differences still exist. Therefore, Marx transferred practice from the ethical and political realm to the social realm, and regarded the political revolution as a link of the social revolution, replacing the traditional political community with a broad social community, expanding the breadth and depth of practical theory, and replacing the narrow political emancipation in traditional practical philosophy with social emancipation and human emancipation.

3.3 Mode of thinking: from established thinking to generative thinking

Regarding human thinking, Marx pointed out: "As for whether human thinking has objective truth, this is not a theoretical issue, but a practical one. People should prove the truth of their thinking in practice, that is, the reality and power of their thinking, namely this-sidedness of their thinking. "Modern philosophy focuses on an entity, and regards the ultimate entity as the object of philosophical pursuit. Entity determines everything, it is the root of everything and the basis of existence, and an all-encompassing metaphysical system is constructed through speculative reason. What Marx was concerned with was not mechanical and rigid facts, but a process. Just as the object of practice is generated in history and produced in reality, the reality that is continuously generated and constituted in practice can also be changed. On this basis, Marx was not concerned with explaining facts, but changing them, which, in terms of its mode of thinking, realized the transformation from substantive and established thinking to procedural and generative thinking.

3.4 Value purport: from "explaining the world" to "changing the world"

At the end of Theses on Feuerbach, Marx clearly pointed out that "philosophers just interpret the world in different ways. The problem is to change the world. [2]" Different from traditional philosophy searching for an eternal category to explain the world, Marx emphasized that the world could be changed by real people carrying out practical activities. Marx completely changed the tradition of degrading labor pioneered by Aristotle, promoting labor from instrumental activities performed by slaves in the Aristotelian period to the level of practice, and combined Hegel's labor at the level of the

abstract spiritual realm with real people. Labor is not only a means to maintain physical survival, but also a self-confirmation of human nature. Understanding the nature of man and the state of human existence and endowing the working class with universal practical subjectivity with labor made practice no longer an "elite" aristocratic activity. Instead, the masses of people can gain freedom and emancipation in their work. Regarding practice as the ultimate means of human emancipation has made the theory of practice a theory of proletarian revolution and the emancipation of all mankind.

4. Conclusion

In the criticism and transcendence of western traditional philosophy, especially classical German philosophy, Marx ended and overcame the incompleteness and wrong views of idealism represented by Hegel and old materialism represented by Feuerbach, which separated Marxist philosophy from the old philosophy. In *Theses on Feuerbach*, the viewpoint of practice runs throughout the text. Marx regarded the category of practice as the fundamental category of Marxist philosophy, and determined the scientific view of practice of Marxist philosophy. In this way, he surpassed his predecessors' practical philosophy in four aspects: question orientation, existence field, thinking mode and value purport, thus completing a fundamental change in the history of philosophy.

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