

The Nature and Mission of Philosophers

Yuqing Min

Northwestern Polytechnical University
Xi'an, China 710072

Abstract—In today's world, cultural convergence is coexisting with ethnic division and economic cooperation is going with political opposition. Diversity of values and value differences are profoundly changing the world. Within the context of globalization, discussions and conversations regarding values and the construction of values are issues raised by this era waiting to be solved urgently; and these are also historic responsibilities and missions for philosophers. The nature and missions of philosophers should be caring for the reality, being problem-orientated, responding to concerns of the society with intense sense of responsibility to the society; perusing the value of "ultimate realness", "ultimate kindness" and "ultimate beauty" while standing on the essence of philosophy; insisting on the fundamental idea of "putting people first", exploring the substantive characteristics of questions of reality, researching and summarizing the general law and value relation regarding the development of questions of reality. Accordingly, philosophers can grasp the trend and value elements of development, providing conditions and value bases for pushing things to develop from lower level to higher level, from disorder to an ordered state and from lower end to higher end of the value chain; and incrementally, make full use of philosophers' humanistic values and social functions and reflects to philosophers' self-recognition, self-improving and the noble pursuit of "changing the world".

Keywords—philosopher; nature; mission; spirit; responsibility

I. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is a social science built on the material basis as well as a basic discipline and means for human beings to investigate the world. The development history of philosophy is the development history of human beings. It is the human beings that opened up the process of understanding nature, knowing oneself, and recognizing the laws governing the development of things, and then creating philosophy. Therefore, the development stage of human cognition constitutes the development stage of philosophy. In the stage of naturalism, human beings got to know the external world as well as the principle, essentiality, structure and evolution of nature. The subject of study further evolved in the stage of ontology to understand man himself as well as the relationship between human beings and nature, what human being is, man's essence, attribute, mode of existence and the value and significance of living; In the epistemology stage, philosophy developed to study the generation, development and structure of cognition as well as the relationship between thinking and cognition; In the stage of axiology, the study focused on the generation, essence,

structure and function of values. The development of philosophy and the evolution of cognition constitute the source power of philosophy to human development. However, the noumenon that drives the development of philosophy is the philosopher. A philosopher must be a thinker and practitioner who grasps the highlands of cognition, value and development.

II. THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

To discuss the nature of philosophers, it is necessary to return to the nature of philosophy first.

A. Several Interpretations as to the Nature of Philosophy

1) *The Science of Wisdom*: Plato and Aristotle believe that wisdom is of God and only God can be called a "sage" while man is to love wisdom and can only be called "philosophos". "Science of wisdom" is the earliest interpretation. It means that people use their own way to explore, present and demonstrate the world, thus forming an understanding and interpretation of the world. This process is regarded by classical philosophers as "the process of wisdom". As human beings increase their ability to understand the world, the "wisdom" that shows the ability to understand the world forms its own specific research field, methods and theoretical systems. This wisdom is separated from philosophy as an independent discipline. Philosophy is such a process of exploring truth.

2) *The Science of Knowledge*: In terms of traditional philosophy, philosophy regards ultimate knowledge and supreme noumenon as its fundamental goal. Therefore, with the development of human society and the progress of science and technology, especially since modern times, philosophy has become the sum of all kinds of knowledge. The intellectual way of thinking has penetrated into the field of philosophy. The nature of "love of wisdom" of philosophy, which is originally the "science of wisdom", has weakened and become "science of knowledge". The improvement of philosophical learning and philosophical accomplishment is regarded as the process of continuous accumulation and growth of philosophical knowledge.

3) *The Science of Thinking Method*: In terms of philosophical history, philosophy has always been regarded as a method of thinking. It is regarded as a matter of how to know the world, how to acquire knowledge and how to speculate. It is a rational tool.

In summary, the nature of philosophy has gone through a process from the study of natural phenomena (philosophy in the form of religion) to the exploration of the scientific phenomenon (the integration of philosophy and science) then to the exploration of the essence of the world (the appearance of early philosophical thought) and even later to the separation of various independent sciences from philosophy, forming various specific philosophical disciplines, and till the exploration of the origin of the world (a dialectical method of studying the way of world existence and studying the common nature, general development laws and existence values of all phenomena in the world. Philosophers are the source of thought and power to promote the development of philosophy. Relying on their own nature to distinguish themselves and through their lifetime hard observation, thinking, research and exploration, philosophers have formed their own unique philosophical research model, summed up the original philosophical theory, and developed their own philosophical system. Their philosophical views and research results have greatly pushed ahead the understanding and promotion of human development.

B. Origin of Philosophers

The nature of philosophers stems from the talent, formed in their later understanding, practice and re-understanding of the world. Any external force will never produce a philosopher. It can produce a philosophical scholar at best. In different historical stages and different philosophical horizons, philosophers have different missions, but the exploration of the nature of philosophers based on the nature of philosophy should be reflected in the following as commonness.

1) *Curiosity*: Strong curiosity about human society and development as well as the natural world on which human beings depend, eager to reveal laws and promote development.

2) *Worship of freedom*: The purpose is to keep the free nature of thought and soul all the time. Only the mind concentration and soul freedom can achieve “the more ordinary one looks, the greater the wisdom; the simpler the method, the more useful it is” and quickly discover and accurately grasp the essence of things.

3) *Pursuit of realness, kindness and beauty*: “To establish a legal concept of beautiful, just and good things and to maintain their existence”, (Plato) with the pursuit of “ultimate realness”, “ultimate kindness” and “ultimate beauty” as the ultimate value, thus leading the trend of social development.

4) *Being Good at grasping the essence of things*: Good at and able to grasp the eternal things, good at grasping the essence of things as a whole from the macro.

5) *Hatred of the false, the evil and the ugly*: “Only when you hate lies can you love truth” (Plato), cherish honesty, be caring and never endure lies. With a strong sense of moral self-discipline and social responsibility, maintaining “health, justice and moderation will follow the truth.” (Plato)

6) *Pursuit of spiritual enjoyment and soul purity*: Underrating material enjoyment and valuing spiritual life, rich in spiritual world while low in material life, with super long perceptual thinking ability, and loving meditation and association.

7) *Strong social responsibility*: Social responsibility originates from two kinds of consciousness and needs: first, longing for a beautiful and harmonious social environment, and willing to sacrifice one’s life; second, paying attention to social respect, and hoping that the exploration, understanding and interpretation of the world system will be widely recognized and respected by society so as to create value for human development and social progress.

III. MISSION OF PHILOSOPHERS

Russell defines philosophy as follows: “Philosophy is something between theology and science. Like theology, it contains human consideration about the things that are not affirmed yet for scientific knowledge, but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, whether traditional or apocalyptic authority. All affirmed knowledge belongs to science; all dogmas involving more than affirmed knowledge belong to theology. But there is an uninhabited domain between theology and science that is attacked by both sides. This uninhabited domain is philosophy.” The mission of philosophers is to study the nature and laws of things related to man and nature in this uninhabited domain.

Nowadays, with the constant independence and rapid development of various disciplines such as natural sciences, social sciences, and conscious sciences, tremendous changes have taken place in the research objects and research fields of philosophy. The research fields between philosophy and various disciplines have been changing accordingly. In China, people engaged in philosophical research mainly come from philosophy education in colleges and universities, and very few people are philosophical practitioners in governments and social organizations. From the perspective of philosophical education in China, in the undergraduate stage, the study of philosophy does not generally involve secondary disciplines. Studies mainly focus on Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy, and Marxist philosophy, mostly involving the study of the knowledge system. The master in philosophy begin to choose the secondary discipline as the orientation of specialized research, such as logic, ethics, aesthetics, religion, philosophy of science and technology, etc. The research becomes more and more specific and narrow. However, whether philosophy students or philosophy teachers currently focus their research on the history of philosophy and the history of the development of related disciplines. There are very few philosophical achievements that are truly independent research of a certain philosophical issue and make independent philosophical judgments on real phenomena so as to influence practice. As a result, even fewer can be called philosophers and widely recognized by the society. Whether is it because philosophers do not work hard, the real problems of social development fail to attract the attention of philosophers or because the mission of philosophy has a strong nature of

historical stage? Whether it is because the origin of the world has been thoroughly studied by Chinese and Western classical philosophers and contemporary people find it difficult to surpass and make new and more accurate interpretation and judgment of the world or because the rapidly changing reality of impetuosity makes it difficult for philosophical research to go further? What should be the mission of contemporary philosophers? This is the perplexity of contemporary philosophy as well as the challenge to further development of philosophy and fulfillment of its mission.

Philosophy has been developed for more than 2000 years. The issues such as the origin of the world, the structure of society, the cognition of human beings and values, and so on, have been systematically and fully demonstrated by various philosophical schools in different stages of the development of philosophy. Although there is no theoretical system that has been universally recognized as philosophical truth until the modern era, philosophers' interpretation of the origin of the world and philosophical arguments on solving practical problems still give people wisdom and inspiration. It is the precious spiritual wealth of mankind. In the 21st century, the reality has become extremely complicated. How to manifest human life quality and human happiness? Where do they come from? Economic globalization leads to the disappearance, integration and conflict of multiculture, and it requires a good development order to protect the development achievements of various civilizations. How has the rapid development of science and technology brought enormous survival risks to human beings while facilitating them? How do human beings manifest and protect their biological property? The enormous environmental problems brought about by human development seriously threaten the future of human development? All these are real problems that contemporary philosophers should pay attention to and solve. The difference is that in terms of research methods, philosophers must make comprehensive use of various methods such as "science of wisdom", "science of knowledge" and "science of methods" to study and solve these practical problems from a broader philosophical perspective and height. Unlike all disciplines, what philosophy solves must be the most fundamental, most macroscopic and most valuable proposition in the field. To this end, the mission of modern philosophers should be mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

A. Seeing Through the Appearance to the Essence

The phenomenon is the superficial characteristic and the external connection of things. It is individual, heterogeneous and superficial, while the essence is the fundamental nature and internal connection of things. It is deep, stable and profound. The fundamental of seeing through the phenomenon to essence is to have the ability to think independently and to make comparative analysis and logical reasoning. Studying the essence requires wisdom. The insight of science finds its expression in rapidly grasping the essence through phenomena and quickly finding out the common causes or connections between different things on the surface, which cannot be separated from the

accumulation of knowledge and practice and requires a higher comprehensive power of observation and accurate judgment. Grasping the essence of things is a process from superficial to underlying, from emotional to rational and from cognition to practice. Understanding the essence of things is the basis for grasping the laws of things. Correct rational understanding is conducive to the profound understanding of the present, foreseeing the development of things, and thus predicting the future in the long run. The reason why human beings need thinkers and philosophers is to think deeply about human nature, society and understanding, grasp human nature, improve society, and safeguard the fairness, justice, freedom and equality of human beings. The practical significance of philosophy lies in discovering real problems, revealing the nature of the problems, and making philosophical judgments and responses to the real world.

B. Discovering and Grasping the General Law of the Development of Things

Whether it is the law of nature, the law of society or the law of cognition, any law reflects the inherent and essential connection in the movement of things. The law is never transferred by human consciousness. Only the unmistakable and inevitable connection in the development of things can become a law, including the law of human cognition. Law is an essential connection rather than a phenomenal one. The law is closely related to its phenomenon. The law is a stable and profound thing in the phenomenon. It is hidden deep inside the thing. The phenomenon is the external manifestation of the law. The law is expressed through the phenomenon. The phenomenon and the law are unified in the same kind of things. The phenomenon is a guide for people to understand the law. Only when people understand the phenomenon can they reveal the law with the help of abstract thinking.

A thing has a variety of attributes, and only the relationship between the essential attributes is the law. Although the law has basic characteristics of inevitability, universality, objectivity, and immutability, the law is also directed at the process of the development of things. Since the law is grasped in the process, it naturally has its dynamic side, which is mainly reflected in the understanding of the law caused by the change of external environments associated with the law. The use of laws is reflected in two aspects: first, people can use their understanding of laws to foresee the trend and direction of the development of things, and guide their practical activities; second, people can use their understanding of laws to change or create conditions, limit the extent of the destructive effect of certain laws, thus making people less harmed or hurt by laws until they become beneficial and produce benefit for human beings. Philosophical research should be based on reality and higher than reality. Just as artists express the world with art, philosophers think and study systematically based on realistic problems and give systematical answers. What makes difference is that art can create, make up good, evil, beautiful or ugly plots and results, while philosophers make difference in their research. Philosophers must follow

objective laws and use science spirit and attitude to go deep into life and discover problems, analyze them, draw conclusions, and make arguments.

C. Making In-depth Study of the Value Relationship of the Development of Things and Constructing a Value System of the Development of Things That Is Conducive to Promoting Social Civilization and Progress

It is generally believed in philosophy that the concept of value originates from the relationship between human needs and the objects that satisfy them. Anything that satisfies people's needs is valuable. Value is the significance of the object with specific attributes to the need of the subject. Creating value is all individual or collective social and economic activities centering and satisfying the needs and development of human beings. People's needs are complicated. In terms of value judgment, it can be divided into advanced or low-level, goodwill or malice, and useful or useless. Different people have different value judgment about different things in different stages. Classical philosophical research has found that no matter how complex the core and form of value, the ultimate goal of value has reached a consensus, that is, the pursuit of "realness", "kindness" and "beauty". Only in the process of seeking "realness", "kindness" and "beauty" can philosophers truly create a kind and useful value that constantly satisfies human needs and construct a value system that is conducive to pushing the social civilization and progress. Value theory is the basic theory of social science. Philosophical research has found that all movements and changes in social things are essentially movements and changes in value relations. Then, building a new value relationship and value system in line with the value standard will greatly arouse people's enthusiasm and reduce contradictions and frictions in the process of development of things. As Darwin put it: the social evolution results in constantly differentiated species with evolution and increase, constantly complex structure with order, as well as constantly evolved functions with intensification. The whole nature and human society are moving toward a more advanced and more orderly organizational structure. (Darwin) Combining the characteristics of various industries in various fields of society, to explore that the value standards, value relations and value system in seeking "realness", "kindness" and "beauty" should become the unshirkable responsibility of contemporary philosophers.

The pursuit of value is the most basic right and responsibility of human beings. People always design and pursue realistic needs according to their own needs and abilities. "Realness", "kindness", "beauty" and "freedom" are the overall goal or the highest realm of people's value pursuit and the value form of the highest humanistic spirit. (Li Deshun, *New Axiology*) "Realness" is the first ideal value realm advocated and pursued by human beings. It is true knowledge, fact, seeking truth from facts, and a real problem. "Realness" is characterized by the inevitability of object and needs people to know and grasp; "kindness" is another highly universal ideal value because people generally pursue "goodness", as a result, they generally yearn for "kindness".

"Kindness" is not only value judgment, but moral judgment as well. Value judgment reflects the needs of human beings. People practice morality not to pursue practical interests, but to maintain human dignity and reflect the intrinsic value of morality. Moral judgments reflect the value needs of people for society. On the ladder of value, "kindness" is higher than the "realness" with the inevitability of objects as the scale, but lower than "beauty" with the freedom of subjects as the scale. "Beauty" is the aesthetic value, which is the higher realm achieved on the basis of realness and kindness. The basis of beauty is safety and freedom. It is the result of people transcending the passive reaction and utilitarianism in their safety and freedom, and discover and experience real, positive, healthy, harmonious as well as an advanced sense of satisfaction and freedom when they discover and experience the real, positive, healthy, harmonious, free and beautiful things in life. Aesthetics needs are expressed in the need of people to a higher realm above reality and utilitarianism. The essence is the need for people to realize their free creative ability. The renewal of contemporary values and the construction of new value relationships and systems lie in a deeper understanding and interpretation of realness, kindness and beauty rather than a departure and trampling of realness, kindness and beauty.

IV. SPIRIT OF PHILOSOPHERS

The mission of philosophers is based on realistic problem-oriented philosophical research, which is doomed that philosophers must possess unique spiritual qualities. The nature and mission of philosophers determine the spiritual connotation of philosophers.

A. Scientific Spirit

Scientific spirit originally refers to the combination of spiritual qualities needed for scientific research and scientific truth, for example, the spirit of exploration, the spirit of seeking realness, the spirit of innovation, and the spirit of criticism, etc. In terms of the philosophical level, the core of scientific spirit should emphasize the values of seeking truth from facts and following the law. It is understood from two aspects: first, when philosophers face real problems, they should not avoid contradictions and choose to be silent. Instead, they should face the problem directly, seek truth from facts, go back to the essential state according to the research field in which the problem lies in, and study and explore the path to respond to the real problem. Second, philosophers should always adhere to the highlands with "realness, kindness and beauty" as the value, stick to the spirit of seeking truth, criticism and innovation and reject utilitarian and impetuosity. Philosophers should respond to social concerns, explore, research and discover the basic laws and intrinsic principles of the development of things, thus respecting the law, follow the law, and promote harmony among human beings themselves and harmony between man and nature.

B. Humanistic Spirit

The core of the humanistic spirit is "people-oriented". It is the understanding and grasp of the existence of human life

as well as the dignity, value and significance of human beings. It is the creation of social environment such as freedom, equality and justice. And it is reflection about life and death, faith, happiness and survival and ultimate concern for mankind. The subject of human society is human beings. Therefore, the ultimate form of human research and knowledge is related to human beings. It can be said that there is no relationship and knowledge that can be separated from human beings, and there is no philosophy or discipline that are independent of human beings. "The philosophers study people, and the object is the happiness of man" (Hegel). Around making people happy, various disciplines are derived accordingly. Therefore, Hume associates all scientific knowledge with human nature. He believes that "logic studies the cognition of human being; ethics studies human tastes and sentiments; political science studies people's relationship with each other in society. Humanity issues are the heart and core of all sciences. Therefore, philosophy should first solve human nature problems." The exploration and research of contemporary philosophers must always put human beings at the core, adhere to the "people-oriented", and study the value relationship between human beings themselves as well as between man and nature on the basis of deeply studying and grasping the law of man's own survival and development and focusing on the needs of human beings. Only by adhering to the people-oriented and advocating and cultivating the humanistic spirit will the research of philosophy help the human society gradually evolve toward a state more in line with human nature, and ultimately achieve a highly harmonious ideal realm. In a word, respecting the value of human beings, respecting the value of spirit, safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of human beings, satisfying the reasonable needs of human beings and promoting the all-round development of human beings are the essential connotations of humanistic spirit.

C. Critical Spirit

Philosophy is a discipline with highly reflective and self-critical consciousness. Through negative discourse, new philosophy breaks through the old philosophical system, opens up new research fields and generates new philosophical viewpoints. It is precisely because this critical and negative characteristic of philosophy that this self-criticism and negative nature of philosophy does not mean that philosophy is a pure process of negation rather than a process of construction. In reality, In fact, any criticism and negation is based on the repeated understanding and interpretation of the original views. It is an irresponsible academic research attitude to criticize the previous research achievements without a good understanding of them. It does not reach the level of philosophical research at all, nor does it reflect the responsibility and realm of philosopher.

V. CONCLUSION

The author believes that the ultimate mission of philosophy is to explore the world to find the foundation for human development and to study methods for human happiness. Therefore, regardless of the country and historical

stage, the problems and pain points that solve the survival of human beings and social development must be the core issues of philosophers' attention. Even sometimes, finding and putting forward problems is more of significance than finding answers and the process of solving them is more valuable than drawing the conclusions. As Russell put it, the field of philosophical research is a problem between theology and science. It is also a problem of the law of reality that human beings still need to explore and know. Therefore, philosophical research requires critical spirit, requires speculative process, and requires repeated verification with reality. The critical goal of reality is to hope that reality develops in the direction of absolute kindness and beauty. Only in this way can philosophers accurately grasp the essence of things and find the law of development of things, build a useful value system to guide practice. The problem to be solved by philosophy must be a fundamental, macroscopic, and cross-border, which is the issue of values.

REFERENCES

- [1] [French] Russel. The History of Western Philosophy [M]. The Commercial Press, 1982.
- [2] Li Deshun. New Axiology [M]. Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2004.
- [3] [German] Heribert Boeder. Lectures on Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit: Nature and History Passing Through the Philosophy of Consciousness [M]. The Commercial Press, 2016.
- [4] Li Deshun. Axiology: A Study of Subjectivity [M]. China Renmin University Press, 1987.