

The Dialectical Relationship Between Materialist Cognoscibilism and Hegel's Cognoscibilism

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Abstract

In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy*, Engels pointed out that "The major fundamental problem of all philosophy, especially modern philosophy, is the relationship between thinking and being." As a fundamental question of philosophy, from an epistemological point of view, different answers to whether thinking and being are identical can be divided into cognoscibilism and agnosticism. In Hegel's philosophy, based on the ego movement of absolute spirit, he adheres to the view of cognoscibilism, and regards thought as the subject of active development, in the process of development, thought externalizes itself into existence and opposes it, and then sublates this opposition back to itself, that is, because of its initiative and creativity, thought creates existence, and existence is the externalization of thought. The process by which the mind transcends itself and diverges, and finally returns to itself, is the process by which thought and being are one. At the same time, Hegel's epistemology does not absolutely oppose the materialist epistemology, but regards it as a link of its own epistemology. It can be seen that Hegel not only expounds the identity of thought and existence on the basis of idealism, but also the development process of concept revealed in his whole logic system is exactly such a process of the same thought and existence, and in the process of analyzing his cognoscibilism, it reflects the dialectical unity of logic, epistemology, ontology and dialectics in Hegel's philosophy.

Keywords

Materialism; Cognoscibilism; Dialectics.

1. The Characteristics and Contradictions of Traditional Materialism and Empiricism on Cognoscibilism

1.1. The Contradiction between Cognoscibilism and Agnosticism in Locke's Philosophy

Locke is a master of modern empiricism. He demonstrated Bacon's empiricism principle more systematically, discussed the origin, certainty and scope of human knowledge, and established the first relatively complete epistemological system since modern times. As a typical empiricism and cognoscibilism, Locke's philosophy points out that all our knowledge is based on experience, and knowledge comes from experience in the final analysis, but at the same time, because of its thorough empiricism, knowledge is limited by sensory experience, as the ultimate object of knowledge, we cannot experience the entity, so the entity is not known. As for the essence of reality, we cannot know it, and what we can know is only the nominal essence of things. On this level, there are also elements of agnosticism in Locke's philosophy, which makes Locke's philosophy inevitably full of contradictions between cognoscibilism and agnosticism.

Locke's philosophy begins with a critique of the traditional idea of talent. He pointed out that there is no such thing as a universal principle of genius agreed upon by all mankind, and that the principles and dogmas, such as moral norms and religious tenets, which have been regarded as innate and universally followed by us in the past, vary from time to time, from place to place,

from nation to nation, and from belief to belief. Innate idealism may lead some people to accept principles as innate after establishing them as eternal and unchanging dogmas, and thus, under such blind faith, people will abandon their own reason and judgment, and be easily exploited and dominated by others. After criticizing the innate idea theory, Locke put forward the blank SLATE theory on the basis of empiricism, which holds that all our knowledge is based on experience. Human beings have the natural ability to accept feelings and form ideas and knowledge. The human mind is like a blank SLATE on which traces are printed through experience to form ideas and knowledge. Locke thus explains the source of our knowledge. As the feeling of external things and the reflection of internal psychological activities, the trace left by experience on the mind is the idea. According to Locke's theory of substance, the idea of substance is a complex idea composed of some simple ideas, including both the special idea of substance and the general idea of substance. Locke proposes the existence of generalized entities but is not knowable.

Simple ideas are derived from experience, which are generated by the direct action of external things and their attributes on the senses and the introspective ideas generated by the direct reflection of the mind on its own psychological activities, and are passively generated by the action of external things or through the way of reflection. In Locke's view, we cannot imagine that these simple ideas can exist independently without any dependence, so we assume a "basic level" as the basis for the existence of simple ideas, which is the entity. In Locke's philosophy, substance, as the basis for the existence of simple ideas, is merely an assumption, something to support the nature of our simple relations, a transcendental support based on our assumptions. Thus, in Locke's philosophy, in ontology, entities do have reality, but in epistemology, they are unknowable.

At the same time, the contradiction between cognoscibilism and agnosticism in Locke's philosophy is also reflected in the relationship between the nominal essence of things and the real essence. Locke investigated the essence of things and distinguished the nominal essence from the real essence. The nominal essence refers to the "species" and "class" essence of things, marking the universality of things and the sign of a class of individual beings, while the real essence is in terms of the individual existence of a thing. According to Locke, the nominal essence is knowable, but the real essence is not knowable. The real essence of the entity is the inner organization of things. Under Locke's empiricism, we can only know the part that can be touched by our sensory experience, and we can only know the phenomena and surfaces of things. However, since this inner organization of things is beyond our experience, we cannot know it. The nominal essence, as an abstract idea of various perceptible properties, can be known through sensory experience.

The origin of the contradiction between cognoscibilism and agnosticism in Locke's philosophy lies in the one-sidedness of his empiricism. Locke systematically demonstrated the principles of empiricism originally proposed by Bacon. He insisted on empiricism and regarded all our knowledge as derived from experience. He ignored the role of rational thinking while exalting the significance of experience. We regard the field reached by predecessors as the end of human cognitive ability and demarcate human cognition, and fail to see the initiative of rational thinking. Locke blindly emphasized sensory experience and regarded simple and passive ideas as the basic material for the production of knowledge. Although Locke did not completely deny the active role of rational thinking, he believed that although the mind was passive in acquiring simple ideas, However, the fact that several simple ideas can form complex ideas is realized by the three abilities of mind: combination, comparison and abstraction. But fundamentally, he still limits knowledge to the range of sensory experience, which will inevitably lead to the contradiction between cognoscibilism and agnosticism in his philosophy.

1.2. Feuerbach's Theory of Cognoscibilism under Perceptual Intuition

On the question of the identity of thought and existence, Feuerbach gave a positive answer on the basis of materialism. For thinking and being, Feuerbach first put forward, the true relationship between thinking and being is only this: being is the subject, thinking is the object. Thinking comes from being, but being does not come from thinking, existence is from itself and through itself. In this materialist standpoint, Feuerbach explained the world through perceptual intuition, and built a bridge between the subject of knowledge and the external things to be known.

Feuerbach's cognoscibilism is closely related to his humanism. Feuerbach first clarified the status of nature, and believed that the world originated from nature, at the same time, "Human is not derived from heaven, but from the earth, not from God, but from nature; Man must begin his life and thinking in nature; Nature is by no means an effect of a substance distinct from it, but, as the philosopher has said, causes itself; Nature is by no means something created, produced or simply not created, but an independent thing that can only be explained by itself and derived from itself." [2] Human is a derivative of nature, and the reason why man is human is not only dependent on himself in isolation and become himself, but is supported by some beings, who are real and natural things, rather than supernatural and imaginary products, and man needs to depend on nature to exist. As the most advanced creature in nature, man can serve as both subject and object, so he can fully serve as the basis for the identity of thought and existence, and it is precisely because of the natural nature of man that the identity of thought and existence is possible.

In his epistemology, Feuerbach emphasizes the role of perceptual intuition, inherits the materialist tradition of empiricism, puts sensibility in the prominent position in the process of cognition, and defend the materialist theory of sensation. He pointed out that the objective material world is the object of our knowledge, feeling is the result of the external world acting on our senses, and it is the source and starting point of our knowledge, and he believed that feeling is certain and reliable, feeling is the absolute function, which contains the ultimate truth. As for the identity of thought and existence, Feuerbach believes that the fundamental reason why man can understand the external world is that man is the product of the world and man is a part of nature. Similarly, for man's senses, Feuerbach points out that human's senses are no more and no less, the use of understanding the world in its totality. In other words, senses of human are also products of the material world, and have an inextricable connection with the material world. The world is always open to man, and we can know it as long as man does not close himself off from the outside world and does not block his senses. Therefore, Feuerbach regards man as the basis of the same thought and existence, and elucidates his epistemological thought.

Feuerbach criticizes Hegel's idealist epistemology while elaborating his materialist epistemology. He criticizes Hegel for equating thought with existence, and holds that Hegel's so-called equating thought with existence is only the equating of thought with itself, so Hegel's conclusion is based on a false foundation. In Feuerbach's view, on the one hand, the identity of thinking and being is based on man, on the other hand, the identity of thinking and being represents the agreement and conformity between the two, but not the same, that is, thinking is the reflection of being. It can be seen that Feuerbach's materialism of cognoscibilism is mainly based on the perceptual understanding of human beings, and although he highlights the important position of human beings, as Marx said in *Theses on Feuerbach*, "The main shortcomings of all materialism in the past (including Feuerbach's materialism) are: objects, reality, and sensibility are understood only in their object or intuitive form, not as sentient human activities, as practices, not as subjects." [3] The main defect of Feuerbach's theory of cognoscibilism, and even of humanism, is that it ignores the role of practice in the process of social life and cognition, and regards the objective world as a pure object unrelated to human

practice, or only regards practice as personal perceptual intuition. Therefore, Feuerbach cannot see the contradiction between reality and society, nor can he see the social history in motion. He did not understand the significance of revolutionary, practical critical activity, and therefore could not really introduce practice into his epistemology.

2. Hegel's Cognoscibilism Based on the Ego Movement of Absolute Spirit

2.1. Hegel's Criticism of Kantian Agnosticism in *Shorter Logic*

Faced with the epistemological dilemma caused by the dispute between empiricism and rationalism, Kant launched the "Copernican Revolution" to make objects conform to ideas, rather than ideas conform to objects, and reversed subject and object. On the one hand, in order to add new knowledge, our knowledge needs to be based on experience, on the other hand, our knowledge needs to be based on experience. The subject of cognitive activity has a set of innate forms of cognition. The knowledge composed of the sources of experience and the innate forms is empirical in terms of its content, and innate in terms of its form, that is, universally necessary. As a rational being, human beings have a set of innate cognitive structure, which we use to capture experience and thus form scientific knowledge. The objective mentioned by Kant is established by subjectivity, and subjectivity is not arbitrary, and it also contains transcendental components. To know the object, we should proceed according to the subjective knowledge structure, which is a priori existing in the subjective form of knowledge to constitute a priori limitation of subjective arbitrariness.

Kant brings the initiative of the subject of human cognition into the theory of epistemology. Any object of cognition is not outside of us waiting for us to know, but our process of cognition actively constructs an object, highlighting the initiative of the subject and highlighting the status of man. But at the same time, by making objects conform to the subject's form of knowledge, this means that things are divided for us into two aspects: on the one hand, things known through the subject's a priori form of knowledge, that is, phenomena; on the other hand, things in themselves, which are outside our form of knowledge, a world we cannot know, because all that man can know is what he has set. Kant set up the innate forms of cognition of the thing itself and man, restricted the rationality of man, and delimited the epistemology. Although the innate forms of cognition of the subject provide the basis for the universal necessity of knowledge, they are also the limits of our cognitive ability. Therefore, Kant's philosophy has cut off the connection between noumenon and phenomena, and reached an extreme split between epistemology and ontology. Kant affirms the possibility and necessity of our understanding of the phenomenal world, but the noumenon world, or the thing itself, is ultimately unknown to us.

Kant emphasized the subjectivity and initiative of man in the epistemological reform, but he restricted this initiative to the scope of knowledge, beyond the scope of man's knowledge, to reach the field of the thing itself that man cannot access. Behind Kant's agnosticism is the demarcation between ontology and epistemology. In the face of epistemological dilemma, Kant put forward a congenital synthetic judgment to reconcile experience and reason, and solved the Hume problem in theory. However, in the implementation path, he met a difficult problem, and the problem became how two different entities go out of themselves to know entities different from themselves. Regarding Kant's agnosticism, Hegel first points out that Kant separates thought from the thing itself is contrary to common sense and belief. The fundamental reason why Kant finally went to agnosticism is that Kant separated thinking and existence and put them in absolute opposition. Hegel clearly states in *Shorter Logic* that "Essence is therefore not after, or outside of, phenomena, but because essence is what actually exists, actual existence is phenomenon." [4] In other words, in response to Kant's view that thinking and being are separated and that things themselves are unknowable, Hegel believes that there is no such

opposition, that the phenomenon and essence of things are two aspects of the same thing, that the phenomenon is the external manifestation of essence, and essence must be expressed through phenomenon, and that the dialectical relationship between them is the unity of opposites.

2.2. Hegel's Argument for the Identity between Thought and Being

In *Shorter Logic*, Hegel demonstrated the identity of thought and existence on the basis of summarizing and criticizing the three attitudes of modern thought towards objectivity, and realized the unity of epistemology, ontology and dialectics by relying on the self-movement of absolute spirit.

Hegel believes that if we admit that there is an independent object outside of thought, and use thought as a tool to understand this objective object, we will inevitably fall into agnosticism. In order to go beyond this agnosticism, it is necessary for a higher being to contain the two within itself, so Hegel bridged the gap between the two by establishing the authority of the absolute spirit, treating the absolute spirit as the only real entity, that is, an active and living entity, and incorporating the subject and object of knowledge into the process of the movement of the absolute spirit self. Hegel abolished the material existence independent of thought. Because of the initiative of thought, Hegel divided things into thought and existence on the premise that all things are the externalization of thought, and on the basis of the elaboration of the identity of thought and existence. In Hegel's philosophy, the meaning of "being" is more as the school creature of thought, spirit is the most complete, highest and final existence, spirit is the whole, and existence is also the existence in the spirit, is the result of the externalization of absolute spirit, concrete existence is determined by the spirit, and as soon as thinking is launched, things of different nature begin to appear, so to speak. In its own identity, the mind determines everything for itself. Therefore, thought is being, existence is thinking, and "Being and self-consciousness are the same thing, and the so-called same thing is not comparatively identical, but fundamentally one thing in itself." [5] The relationship between thinking and being is essentially the relationship between thinking and thinking. As for the identity of thought and existence, since thought is the active subject of development, existence is the product of thinking externalization, and absolute spirit is both subject and object, both thinking and existence, then the process of thinking itself exceeding, externalizing and returning to itself is the process of thinking and existence. It may be said, therefore, that Hegel maintains that the identity of thought and being is essentially the identity of thought and itself, or that thought and being arrive at the identity in the absolute mind.

At the same time, Hegel also gives the ontological significance to the question of the identity of thought and existence. First of all, for Hegel, for thought and existence, thought is primary, and absolute mind is the real and primary entity. The object itself is the subject, Hegel's "entity is subject" is the supreme principle of epistemology, and all his philosophical principles are derived from this basic principle, entity is subject, subject is the development of itself, the development of itself is a necessity, but at the same time, the development of itself is a freedom, so the development of itself is both a necessary principle and a free principle. Starting from this, Hegel clarifies the identity of thought and existence by further exerting the principle of subjectivity. The entity, as the most real and complete being, is not only objective, but also active in itself, and contains in itself the agency of the development of motion and the inner power of self-development, only in this way can it unfold itself and become reality. In other words, although the entity contains the identity at the beginning of its existence, it is not an identity without difference. On the contrary, it contains negation and contradiction in itself. Since the entity itself has agency, it negates itself and becomes a developed reality. Therefore, its reality can only be explained if the entity is understood at the same time as the subject, as it carries out its own movement, and the agency of the entity as the subject. In itself it contains pure negation,

so that it is a single thing that denies itself and thus splits itself in two, establishes itself as the opposite, then sublates its contradictions and opposites and reestablishes its unity. Thus the process of movement of the entity is its self-movement, and the world is its externalization and expansion. Since the entity is the subject, as a self-caused existence, it has its own agency, so the movement of the entity becomes a circle in which the entity develops itself and completes itself with the goal of ending, and it is only real when the entity really becomes the subject, unfolds itself from the potential and reconstructs its identity. The real substance is not a ready-made object, but a process of development, which unfolds itself in its own self-motion, and becomes reality only when it reaches the end, so that truth is the totality that contains within itself all the unfolding elements. Compared with Kant, the entity is not only objective, but also active. The entity itself contains the agency of movement development, and thus it is possible to develop itself and become reality. The mere substance, therefore, is only a potential factor, and it is not true reality when it develops itself into the world, but only when it develops itself into the world and abandons all distinctions to rebuild its identity, which is carried out through the cognitive activity of the absolute of the human spirit.

Hegel's epistability theory is the result of the movement of the concept itself. For the identity of thought and existence, Hegel on the one hand regards thought as an infinitely rich and complete absolute spirit; on the other hand, he does not simply regard existence as an objective existence outside of thought, which is not transferred by human will, but as a school creature of thought, which is the result of the externalization of absolute spirit. The existence is controlled by thinking, thus proving the identity of thinking and existence.

3. The Dialectical Relationship between Hegel's Cognoscibilism and Materialist Cognoscibilism

Hegel saw the development of philosophy as a circle. For past philosophy, Hegel did not simply deny it, but regarded past philosophy as the content of his own philosophy and a link in the development process of his own philosophy. Similarly, Hegel still followed this view and regarded materialist cognoscibilism as a link in his own cognoscibilism.

Hegel sees philosophy as an objective science of truth, a conceptual understanding, a science of the necessity of truth. The history of philosophy is a process of dynamic development and continuous awakening of spirit, which reflects the essential connection between reason and history. At the same time, in Hegel's view, history and logic are unified, the history of philosophy is consistent with the self-movement of absolute spirit, and both are rational development and movement on the basis of time, and this development is also tortuous, it unfolds itself like a circle, and returns to itself through infinite development, and it is the unity of freedom and necessity. The point of view of philosophical knowledge is itself the richest and most concrete point of view, the result of many processes. Hegel did not simply abandon and negate the previous philosophy; he regarded it as an integral part of his philosophy. In other words, Hegel understood all human mental activity as a process of development towards philosophy, and the ultimate goal of all human mental activity was to find philosophy, to understand the absolute. All philosophy before Hegel is a stage in this process of inquiry, and even if he is wrong or not entirely reasonable, he should not be completely rejected, because this is a part of what constitutes philosophy. The whole history of human philosophy is full of the struggle of philosophers criticizing, overthrowing and replacing each other, and all the spiritual activities of human beings are ultimately the process of moving toward philosophy, and the process of gradually unveiling the veil of philosophy.

"Philosophy is the thought of the essence of the spirit of the time and takes this essence as its object. Insofar as philosophy is within the spirit of its time, this spirit is the specific content of philosophy, but at the same time philosophy, as knowledge, goes beyond this content and

stands in opposition to it. This transcendence is only formal, for philosophy has no other content." [6] Philosophy is the product of its time; it can only satisfy the requirements or interests of its time; its purpose is to discover the forms and needs of the spirit within the scope of that period; ancient philosophies may still exist in the present age, but they cannot be restored in the present age. Therefore, for the past philosophy, Hegel advocated that in the process of research it should be placed in a specific era background to investigate, to truly grasp the absolute spirit in that era, that stage of the development of the state and degree. Both materialism and empiricism have their historical background, which is the inevitable development state of absolute spirit at that time, so they also have historical rationality.

Hegel's epistemology, therefore, does not absolutely oppose and simply deny empiricist or materialist epistemology, but regards it as a link in the development process of its own epistemology, as an object to be sublated. That is to say, in this process of dialectical development, Hegel sublates the lower content as an effective component of the higher content, makes it a higher content, that is, carries on the dialectical negation of it, and realizes the return to the absolute spirit in the process of his own self-opening.

4. Conclusion

The problem of the relationship between thinking and being is a problem that no philosophy can avoid. Hegel's epistemology is based on the premise that "absolute spirit" is the creator of the real world, and what he calls the identity of thought and existence is the identity of thought, that is, absolute spirit, which is idealist. However, it is undeniable that Hegel's knowability theory emphasizes the initiative of thinking and holds that in the process of cognition, the opposition between subject and object can be gradually solved, rather than an insurmountable gap, so it also has dialectical and positive significance.

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