gustav / March 03, 2011 02:47PM

Some Responses to Allen Wood's “Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil”
Some Responses to Allen Wood's “Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil” (2009)
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Allen Wood nicely presents Kant's idea (in Religion with the Boundaries of Mere Reason) that to be moral or evil requires the intermediate combination of simple sensibility and simple rationality (such an influence we can also find easily in Goethe), for to the beings in both there's no place of free choice – the former is taken to be lack of the ability while the latter is taken to be lack of the possibility of misuse of reason. This idea perfectly accords with Kant's another relevant stance (in 1st Critique) that free moral agent must come to its exercise in the combination of as in phenomenal world and in noumenal world at once.

To start with an external explanation, if certain being cannot choose, for it does not have the ability to get aware of objects and states of affairs as human does (namely, to get aware of objects as options, of rules and natural development, of the formal conformity and then responsibility between an act together with its consequences, and the cause of the act itself), the behaviors of such being can the best be taken to be physical accidents. On the other hand, a simple rational being without any sensible ingredients cannot have any intra-contradiction, for a simple rational being to have any irrational ingredients or to make any irrational conducts is not reasonably acceptable. However, a being which is necessarily restricted in sensible awareness and at meanwhile accessible to the pure rational system, can have restriction (to know the objects/options) and liberation (to know objects/options – to alter the directedness of the awareness among options) at once, and then can choose.

To go further, in his enquiry to the epistemological condition of human experience (1st Critique), the necessary, immediate combination/relation between sensibility and intelligibility is grounded upon the fact that space and time are necessary to any human real awareness while any thing occurring in space and time can be thought with logical understanding. Consequently, (1) owing to the immediacy between sensibility and intelligibility as well as the formal conformity between the transcendental condition and its result, the validity of taking an act as an act of one's own is provided. (2) Since the rules and the developments of states of affairs ground their matter in sensibility and their forms in intelligibility, i.e., that is developed is always sensible, while the development always follows intelligible rules (so recognized and so developed in causality), the theoretical reason enables human to identify sensibly restricted objects and options with their certain possibilities of development. (3) The difference between the simple rational system and the synthesized empirical system of understanding's conceptualization (resting upon the independence and dependence from the sensibility – independence for the relation between sensibility and intelligibility is only formal and not material, dependence for the relation is epistemologically necessary in experience), creates the difference between the demand of pure reason and the needs in empirical self, only upon the ground of which morality first becomes a matter.

With the above understanding, some puzzles regarding Kant's morality may be explained. First, as Allen Wood also raises, evil must come after the social engagement, especially in comparison with others. Second, and relevantly, can the free moral being (in humanity) do anything evil? These puzzles must be explained first with the clarification of the formation of society in a Kantian sense. Society is a combination resulting from the combination of sensibility and intelligibility, too. Society is the genetic expression of humanity in all human conducts: humanity is the essence of all individual humans in a sense that every member of the group belongs to the same community only if they share the same theoretical and practical capacity (in Kant's terms, both subjective and objective universal communicability, and then society is recognized empirically so that it is subjected to the combination of sensibility and intelligibility, too.

Kant begins his Groundworks for the Metaphysics of Morals with the distinction between hypothetical and categorical good, explaining exactly the social, human complexity in the pursuit of ends. Technically separating, hypothetical relation is a synthesis, i.e., to take something to be something else; categorical relation is an analytics, something appears as itself. Hypothetical good is then something satisfying certain external purpose, namely, good for others, while categorical good is something satisfying for its own purpose, namely good in itself. In this context, Kant emphasizes, morally good is the only example of the categorical good. The reason may be the following: morally good is the only expression of pure rationality in humanity.

All the human possible awareness must be the result of cognition. Once cognized, the synthesis of sensibility and intelligibility is necessary. Attached with the value and pursuit of ends in humanity, the resulted awareness appears to be the need of empirical self. Any purpose in such a form must be an external one, for the purpose itself is first a synthesized object with the combination of intuition (satisfaction) and concept (empirical rules such as functions) which is then associated with another existing object (means) – e.g., because I think drinking coffee makes me excited or keeps me fresh (the concept of a purpose), I drink coffee (the another object) and feel satisfied accordingly (the intuition). Any social engagement and the comparison must come with such a notion of purpose; the social origin of evils is the result of the need of empirical self.

Regarding the demand of simple reason, thanks to its mere formal link to reality, the notion of purpose is different in kind to the notion of purpose in empirical need. Because pure rational system only consists of, and considers, pure rules (rule-ness, regulation) and the purposive relations ensuring the regularity itself, no contradiction is possible in it and hence no self-destructive demand is offered by it. The human agent can access the system intelligibly with the formal link, so, although there is no sensible expression of the pure intelligibility, human can “recognize” the intelligible forms in sensible states of affairs – including the conformity between the will (concept of purpose) and the actions (result of the concept of purpose), the moral meaning of human actions, the difference of hypothetical satisfaction and categorical satisfaction, etc. And since the pure rational system considers only homogeneous rules, the output value is the self-manifestation of the demand itself in the realization of the rules, similarly as the object-hood manifests itself in any object – not depending on another empirically associated objects. A free agent is free, I try to suggest, only in so far as the agent gets accessed to the demand of reason when the agent directs the directedness of the awareness from the known objects to “the knowing”, in which the formal conformity between sensibility and intelligibility, restriction and freedom, and the difference between the simple rational system and the synthesized empirical system, become possible at once. Following that, a moral agent that is not simply sensible nor simply rational, must be absolutely free (in a sense as also phenomenally restricted), and in such a condition, any corresponding action must be morally good – for in such a condition, the notion of “purpose” is altered from the relative, hypothetical mechanism to the absolute, self-supported mechanism. When the former notion is applied, the thinking subject is not free for the thinking is subjected to the cognitive synthesis; when the latter is applied, the thinking subject is free for the cognitive synthesis is subjected to the thinking.

Related Oriental Concepts:
「天地不仁」、「天道無親，常與善人」《老子》
「蓍之德，圓而神；卦之德，方以知；六爻之義，易以貢。聖人以此洗心，退藏於密，吉凶與民同患。神以知來，知以藏往，其孰能與此哉！」《易經繫辭傳》
「離分別」（General agreement in Buddhism）
「事法界、理法界、理事無礙法界、事事無礙法界」《大方廣佛華嚴經》、澄觀《華嚴法界玄鏡》、宗密《註法界觀門》
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Edited 5 time(s). Last edit at 03/03/2011 02:55PM by gustav.

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mimizorro / March 12, 2011 04:33AM

Re: Some Responses to Allen Wood's “Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maat

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/12/2011 04:35AM by mimizorro.
