

Reviewing the Interpretation of Confucian Destiny Thought from the Perspective of Moral Luck Theory

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Abstract

Rationalism has been occupying an important position in the interpretation of Confucian thoughts. However, it faces many limitations from the view of recent research. The theory of moral luck comes from the reflection on moral rationalism, emphasizing that the reflection on morality should return to the living world and pay attention to the context of human life and practice. This has brought new inspiration for the modern interpretation of Confucianism, especially the modern interpretation of the Confucian concept of destiny. The Confucian concept of fate advocates that people understand the “mandate of heaven” through self-cultivation and moral practice, and bravely undertake the mission they understand. The exploration of the Confucian concept of destiny is helpful for a deep understanding of important propositions such as the relationship between heaven and man in Confucianism.

Keywords

Confucianism, Moral Luck, Destiny View, Self-Cultivation

1. The Content and Significance of the “Moral Luck” Theory

After the Enlightenment, the subjectivity of human beings has been promoted unprecedentedly. The moral planning of human life revolves around human beings as rational beings. Normative ethics represented by Kantianism and utilitarianism occupy the dominant position of modern moral philosophy (Tang, 2010). The theoretical paradigm of ethics especially emphasizes the importance of the initiative of moral actors. The research tasks of its moral philosophy focus on how to determine the moral attributes of behavior, how to judge whether actors follow moral rules, and ask questions such as the basis of morality. The research

vision of normative ethics, just like Hume's theoretical attempt in *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Moral*, hopes that moral research can also find that definite scientific principle just like physicists find physical laws. Under such circumstances, the study of modern moral philosophy places particular emphasis on human will, motivation, conscience, rational calculation, and moral principles. This theoretical tradition pursues clear moral laws and hopes to demonstrate the certainty of morality through the universal inevitability contained in human's rationality. What the rationalism hope is that actors follow certain moral guidelines through careful weighing in their thinking and actions, take on certain moral responsibilities, and realize the moral obligations or higher moral values that they should fulfill.

Even nowadays, the research paradigm of normative ethics is still exemplary. It dedicates to provide an indispensable thinking framework for human beings as rational beings to conduct moral reflection. However, due to the abstract nature of its theoretical research, it more or less simplifies the complexity of the context of human life, coupled with its overly optimistic attitude towards the self-sufficiency of human reason or will. Also rationalism's excessive adoration for the inherent goodness of human beings and too much attention to rules and complete theoretical models, let it ignore that human beings are also beings of emotional attachment and moral subjects in specific situations. In this case, human fragility and limitation have not been fully taken into account. Regarding this drawback, many scholars have criticized it from different theoretical perspectives. The most notable topic is the impact of human fate or external uncertain encounters on human moral behavior and happy life, which was first proposed by Bernard Williams's moral luck problem.

The concept of "moral luck" has not yet been uniformly defined. Bernard Williams proposes this concept rhetorically. He describes moral luck as a peripheral, ubiquitous, and influential. The objective existence of moral life, those things that are not in the domain of the ego are not within the control of the ego. He believes that people will not have ambiguity about their understanding of luck by recalling life experiences. He uses this statement on the premise that luck will destroy people's self-sufficient life and explaining this concept through the analysis of "actor regret", the existence of moral luck, and a distinction which is between internal luck (caused by the actor himself) and external luck (caused unexpectedly by the actor himself).

Of course, the notion of moral luck appears to be a contradiction in terms of those already accustomed to rationalizing moral claims that good people are self-sufficient and unaffected by luck. The presence or absence of "luck" is irrelevant. For a long time, the issue of luck has not been at the center of the attention of rationalist moral philosophers. Its marginal status is often determined by similar moral considerations. All that may determine our natural nature, and ignore the accidental circumstances may affect us, to reconstruct the world according to human reason (Williams, 2007). For Kant, only actions that are free

from external accidental interference and within the scope of the agency are actions related to morality; only actions that agency consciously conduct according to rational orders and requirements are real moral actions.

He believed that the rationally based goodwill which is in the heart of an agency is not altered by luck; what is affected by luck is only the will's ability to realize its intentions (Williams, 2007). But in real life, even if human reason is strong enough, motives are pure enough, and will is strong enough, the human limitations of moral actors always prevent them from losing control of uncertain factors, and from uninvited guests such as luck and chance interfering which can easily disrupt individual's life planning and even affect moral evaluation.

The theoretical significance of moral luck is that, by discussing the realistic uncertainty of "luck", people realize that the exploration of ethical knowledge cannot be carried out blindly according to the moral planning of enlightenment. The internal and external relations of the initiative of beings face up to the tension between certainty and uncertainty, and return to a concrete, rich, and humanized moral life. They focus not only on moral concepts, moral responsibilities, and obligations but also on how people should live themselves.

2. Interpretation of Confucius's "Knowing the Mandate of Heaven (Tian)"

Bernard Williams raised the issue of "moral luck", which corrects and unmasks rationalist moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism. Kant's rationalist moral philosophy believes that the basis of moral value can only be the sufficient self-sufficiency of good will, and has nothing to do with factors such as talent and environment. The innate condition for the possibility of morality lies in the fact that every rational being follows the moral law of universal necessity, and man becomes a divine moral subject by relying on moral self-discipline, without relying on or yielding to any external factors. However, in the field of virtue ethics, the issue of luck has long been valued. There is philosophical space to explain luck in Aristotle's virtue ethics. Because the main purpose of its virtue theory is to realize a complete and prosperous life by improving the practical wisdom and good quality of actors. In the process, "small amounts of good fortune or misfortune are certainly not enough to change a life. But major favorable events make life happier. Major and frequent bad luck may be reversed due to the pain and hindrance to activities caused destroy happiness." (Aristotle, 2003). Nussbaum believes that compared with the Stoics who believed that the external good of life has no real value, Aristotle believed that the external good of life has no real value. Life still needs to be supplemented by good luck, "We only live in a kingdom, the kingdom of nature. All our abilities, including our moral abilities, are worldly, and all need the goodness of the world to provide conditions for their prosperity" (Nussbaum, 2007). The goodness here includes not only good luck external to people, but also good luck that constitutes people's inner qualities.

Similar to the early emphasis on luck in Aristotelian virtue ethics, the ancient Chinese sages had a deep understanding of the issue of “luck” very early on, and the related discussions were mainly understood in the category of “fate”. The discussion of “destiny” by ancient Chinese sages was already a grand sight in the pre-Qin period. The ancient Chinese philosophers discussed “destiny”, which reflected the thought of the relationship between heaven and man. Their speech scenes are often seen in the discussion of related topics such as the legality of the rule, the moral requirements of rulers, the transcendence of respecting morality and protecting the people, and how to let the rulers realize the sacred meaning beyond personnel and , therefore to establish a sense of urgency.

Since Confucianism comes up, the focus of the concept of destiny has changed. Confucius educated his disciples not to achieve the ethical goals that have been agreed upon but to show others the behaviors in life practices such as filial piety and benevolence. Do what you want to do and demonstrate the spirit of humanistic self-awareness. Judging from its related discussions on “fate”, it is mainly reflected in the teaching of a gentleman to become a virtue, such as “a gentleman has three fears, fearing the destiny, fearing adults, and fearing the words of sages”; “If you don’t know your destiny, you can’t think of yourself as a gentleman”. It can be seen here that Confucius’ understanding of fate is obviously different from that of previous rulers or thinkers. The former people cared more about external factors that affect people’s fate, such as political conditions and natural environmental factors, while Confucius put moral virtue. As the key factor affecting the fate, it downplays the influence of external factors on the fate of people.

The problem here is that if Confucius’s teachings on becoming a virtuous person can lead to the spontaneous formation of moral behaviors such as self-cultivation and caring for others, without relying on external conditions, how to explain Confucius’s belief that the way of a gentleman requires “knowing the destiny” and “fear of fate”? In addition, if the “destiny” in Zhu Zi’s explanation of “knowing the destiny at fifty” is the way of heaven, then if Confucius said that “the way will be implemented” and “the way will be abolished” are both destinies, then the way of heaven will be carried out or abolished. And what should people respect, fear, and know? The question here has both similarities and differences in theoretical significance to the “moral luck” question raised by Bernard Williams. The same thing is that they all recognize the existence of “fate” as luck, and affirm the influence of “fate” as an objective restriction on the behavior subject. The difference is that Bernard Williams believes that luck will have a substantial impact on people’s lives, so we should pay attention to the actual situation of people’s fragility, while in the view of Confucian philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius, the relationship between righteousness and fate or the relationship between life and death. The ideological concern among them not only recognizes the inconsistency of virtue and happiness, but also affirms the substantive influence of “fate”, and goes a step further, has a deeper considera-

tion of moral practice or self-cultivation in terms of people's attitude towards fate.

Regarding the discussion of this issue, the more classic interpretations are as follows, which are presented one by one to compare the advantages and disadvantages of different interpretations, to see the true meaning of Confucius and Mencius knowing and establishing destiny.

First, Lao Siguang's theory of the separation of righteousness and destiny. On the issue of people's attitudes towards a destiny, Lao Siguang believes that there are four types (Lao, 2015): 1) believe that destiny cannot be violated, so people should strive to realize this destiny; 2) recognize destiny It cannot be violated, but it does not recognize the dominance of transcendence, and attributes fate to inevitability; 3) recognizes the realm of fate, but deduces that "consciousness" cannot be done at all; 4), according to Confucius' standpoint, distinguishes "righteousness" and "fate" At the same time, it recognizes the existence of "conscious dominance" and "objective restrictions", and demarcates their respective areas of belonging, and then establishes human dominance as a value standard and cultural concept, and only regards all objective restrictions as material conditions.

The purpose of Lao Siguang's theory of separation of righteousness and destiny is to avoid the nihilistic tendency of fatalism and to stand up for the meaning of moral subjectivity. "If knowledge looks at life from the aspect of fate, then all phenomena in life are just a part of the phenomenon of the universe; since they are all determined under the inevitable series, there is no such thing as right or wrong; from this one step further, all so-called human efforts, and it is fundamentally worthless." Therefore, what Lao Siguang emphasizes here is the mission responsibility and pioneering significance of the human culture of Confucius. And the root of humanistic value is completely introverted in human autonomy, which reflects Lao Siguang's standpoint on the relationship between freedom and necessity. Under this view, knowing destiny and knowing destiny are one thing, but the separation of righteousness and destiny is based on the separation of the world of value and the world of reality, to cut off the transcendent relationship between man and metaphysical meaning. Humanism is the personal style of historians of philosophy who pursue objectivity, and their thinking paradigm is to interpret the ethical spirit of Confucius and Mencius as a complete system of "subjective philosophy".

Second, Xu Fuguan's moral transcendence theory of destiny. Xu Fuguan distinguishes the word "fate" in "The Analects of Confucius" in "The History of Chinese Human Nature Pre-Qin Chapter", he believed: "Any word in the Analects of Confucius that says only one word refers to the name of fate. This is similar to Lao Siguang's interpretation of Destiny Heaven, but if it refers to the "destiny" and "heavenly way" connected with heaven, it refers to a universal and eternal "moral law" of heaven, which embodies what is called "the transcendent character of morality" (Xu, 2002). Xu Fuguan believes that Confucius knew the

destiny of heaven at fifty, and this knowledge was proof, because “heaven had entered into the root of his life, so he often felt his affinity with heaven, his sense of concreteness, and his sense of responsibility to heaven, A sense of mission in order to form a strong self-confidence in his life.” And Confucius’ fear of the destiny “is actually the reverence for the infinite moral requirements and responsibilities in his inner personality world. The integration of nature (“Xing”) and heaven is an inner. The completion of the world of personality is the completion of man.” From this point of view, compared with Lao Siguang, Xu Fuguan expresses the idea of the relationship between heaven and man and the harmony between man and nature. Some kind of transcendental spiritual symbolism, and the focus is still a way of thinking that highlights the subjectivity philosophy of Confucian humanism but retains the transcendental spiritual dimension.

Third, Tang Junyi’s theory of the unity of righteousness and destiny. Regarding people’s attitude towards a destiny, Tang Junyi advocates the viewpoint of “unity of righteousness and destiny, no righteousness and no destiny”. “Practicing the Tao is righteousness, and as an angel, I have to walk the Tao is my destiny. This is indeed the unity of righteousness and destiny... However, Confucius, when righteousness is practicing the Tao, and when life is abolished by the Tao, still only said that people should know their fate, and only frankly fear what is the reason for the mandate of heaven? From Confucius’s thought, the righteousness of man is inherent in practicing the way. However, when there is no righteousness to practice the way, one should bear the abolishment of the way and know that one should be afraid of it, and it is still righteousness.” It is advocated that when traveling around the world with Confucius, he repeatedly points out that the Tao was not good enough, and realizes that whether he did the Tao or not, he should bear and accept it. This so-called knowing fate and fearing fate, knowing lies in the place where righteousness is, that is, where destiny is. To bear morality is to listen to the call of destiny. What is feared is not to be arrogant and self-violent in good times, but to encourage oneself in adversity.

In addition, Tang Junyi holds a critical attitude towards the following two views, one is that “destiny is only the peace of the human heart and prestige”, and the other is “the destiny is the way that the destiny is shown by the sky or directly ordered by people” “The reason why the former cannot be established is that since Confucius aspired to learn, he has determined himself to be self-sufficient, and his heart is at ease. Why wait until fifty to know destiny, which is inconsistent with Confucius’s mentality of learning and practicing Taoism? At the same time, the critique of this point of view can also be aimed at the philosophical standpoint of subjectivity similar to that of Lao Siguang, that is, to understand human subjectivity flatly, and to abandon the possibility of people listening to transcendent meanings. The latter negates the idea that heaven, as a transcendent existence, constitutes absolute dominion over human beings. This is the old view of destiny in “Classic of Poetry” and “Book of Documents”, which is

also inherited from Mozi's view of the will, and it does not conform to Confucius's view of destiny. The idea of the relationship between heaven and man adopted by Tang Junyi is a "call/response" model, starting from the specific situation and life experience of people, to understand heaven and man, and present the existence experience of man to heaven. Therefore, Tang Junyi objected to describing the relationship between heaven and man as a confrontation between "beyond entity" and "subject", because it cuts off the "game" state of "play" between heaven and man, which has a responsive interaction between heaven and man.

Judging from the comparison of the above three viewpoints on the Mandate of Heaven, their common feature is that they advocate the restoration of the subjective spirit of human beings from the Confucian perspective. Advocating an interpretation path that can effectively make up for the over-emphasis of Lao Siguang and Xu Fuguan's humanism, it also demonstrates the spiritual characteristics of Confucianism that interacts between heaven and man, the way of heaven and humanity are inseparable, and the destiny of heaven is endless. However, Mr. Tang's interpretation is a little insufficient in that it does not specifically clarify what the true meaning of tomorrow is. As the basis of human morality and existence, the meaning of heaven cannot be fully explained from the standpoint of human beings. If what Confucius called heaven is not the personal God or God in Western theology, then how does heaven call people? This needs to be further explained.

3. Mencius's Concept of "Fate"

Mencius's understanding of fate has inherited Confucius's tradition of knowing fate and has developed it. He put forward the idea of "establishing fate". Together with the three levels of meaning of "Liming", it has a richer spiritual connotation.

3.1. Courage to Face the Fate

As far as the experience that people may encounter, Mencius distinguished the scope of the heavenly, the life-like, and the human-like, the division?

The basis of this is whether the occurrence of events is determined by human will and behavior, such as "He who does not do what he does is God; what does not cause its fate.". Mencius admitted that there are empirical facts that cannot be regulated and controlled by the will of the subject. There are "those who seek within me" and "those who seek outside themselves". The key to the distinction is what a gentleman seeks. For example, there is a difference between being in me and being outside. For another example, Mencius mentioned that the son of Shun was unworthy and the son of Yu won the hearts of the people. Mencius first accepted and acknowledged the understanding of "fate" that occurred in the empirical world, and the revealed humanistic rational spirit did not attribute those things that are affected by "fate" to the fatalism or determinism worldview.

However, for unexpected arrivals such as “ones that come from nothing”, Mencius’s attitude advocates “accepting what is right”, that is, when facing uncertain and accidental events, one should have a psychological preparation: As far as possible from the place that people can grasp, the trend or development of the event is carried out legitimately and moderately. This kind of practical spirit of intervening in fate and focusing on human intervention inherits and develops the spiritual tradition of Confucius “knowing what can’t be done”, and also embodies one of the things that people should have in the face of fate to the greatest extent. This is a kind of teaching, exhortation, and invitation for fellow or successors.

The starting point of this kind of righteous livelihood theory is to focus on whether people can do it or not, and whether they can cause it or not. What they expect is to realize inner goodness in the sense of human potential. Mencius described the experience of breaking branches for the elders and taking Taishan Mountain to surpass the North Sea. In Mencius’s view, this is a visible difference. It is closely related, but through continuous learning and practice of self-cultivation and sharpening the will, a certain degree of “exhaustion” can be made possible. Even if it is not a requirement in the spiritual dimension, it is always worth looking forward to and encouraging.

3.2. The Way of a Gentleman Is to Understand the Coming of Destiny

In ancient Chinese thought, the usage of fate does not mean fate or luck but meaning of “order”. The chanting of the four directions is also to encourage the successors of future generations to respond positively to the moral requirements of destiny. The people who received orders were firstly the ancient rulers. Later, the relative independence and spiritual awakening of the “scholar” class led to a cultural change in the understanding of order. In a political sense, it was the scholar class who actively participated in politics through “ordering”. In the spiritual sense, the actual practice of winning the king and practicing the way is the possibility for the scholar class to open up the spiritual understanding that everyone may receive destiny.

The process of waiting for one’s destiny is a process of passive waiting from an experience point of view, but, in terms of its spiritual experience, it also has an active meaning of receiving the destiny from the bottom up. Waiting for one’s life is not a passive and silent listening to the vast and silent destiny, but an active practice through self-cultivation and other efforts, and it is always ready. The spiritual experience in this process, on the one hand, is the belief in the transcendent source of meaning and the existence of universal meaning directed by the “Mandate of Heaven”, on the other hand, it is also an actor who is underappreciated and in a difficult and dangerous place to listen to his destiny to test. This active and passive state highlights the tension in the gentleman’s spiritual journey. The most vivid description of this kind of tension is the chapters and

sentences such as “Heaven will send a great mission to the people”. These chapters and sentences describe the requirements for people to be ordered from the perspective of “Heaven”. Urge yourself to encourage yourself.

3.3. Courageously Bear the Arrangement of Fate

Accepting the arrangement of fate is the aspect of Mencius’s fate theory that has been discussed more by later scholars. “Li” and “Ming”, the two words themselves contain outstanding action power. The meaning of Li is easy to understand, and it means to establish and establish. But the meaning of fate can have two different interpretations, descriptive and normative. But from a descriptive point of view, Ming as a noun is related to lifespan. From a normative point of view, orders can return to their original meaning of “order”, and from a moral point of view, they have the meaning of self-command and self-appointment, which is a self-requirement of a moral subject.

Mencius’s spirit of courageously undertaking the mission is concentrated in the two themes of “a gentleman does not think it is the cause of nature” and “a gentleman does not think it is fate”. There is an obvious distinction in value between these two sentences. Regarding these two sentences First of all, it should be noted that this distinction is not an exclusive distinction of either-or, but out of the requirement for moral self-assertion, and it is necessary to make a priority between people’s perceptual desires and moral interests. The value of nature is emphasized. This kind of conception of nature rather than life focuses on affirming the natural characteristics of moral aspirations, and deliberately cultivates and develops the realization of the moral self as much as possible. This is the moral enlightenment for everyone, and it is also the inner basis for everyone to make fundamental decisions about how to live, especially the moral life. In the proposition of “Liming”, the basis for the meaning of the moral self upheld by Mencius is still inseparable from the guidance of the form of “Heaven”. Between destiny and destiny is the practice of recuperating the mind. This moral value is not simply derived from subjectivity but from the transcendent existence of heaven, which embodies the spiritual characteristics of Mencius’ theory of life.

In the proposition of having the courage to undertake the mission, the meaning of the moral self-upheld by Mencius is still inseparable from the guidance of the form of “Heaven”. The interaction, between destiny and destiny, is the practice of mental rest. This moral value is not simply derived from subjectivity but from the transcendent existence of heaven, which embodies the spiritual characteristics of Mencius’s theory of life. The “self” in Mencius’ moral thought needs to be grasped in the relationship between heaven and man, man and beast, and man and man. Generally speaking, Mencius’s self-view emphasizes that people can continuously realize their own moral potential through moral practice in social life, which is manifested in the improvement of moral realm, and becoming a gentleman advocated by Confucianism is his moral ideal.

4. Sanctification and Luck

The question of moral luck raised by Bernard Williams also has luck considerations for the possibility of human sanctification, “a good person, or a sage, will not be fooled by impermanent luck, but he is born to be a sage, or becoming a sage, is still a kind of luck, which may be called ‘internal luck’: there is no (according to the mainstream view) the way for ordinary people to become saints.” Mencius’s idea of undertaking a mission discussed in the previous section is quite similar to Kant’s rational self-legislation. It seems that moral self-discipline or self-revelation does not need to depend on external conditions. This is also in line with the expression of free will, but the question is why this kind of moral inspiration cannot be applied to everyone. From the point of view of the empirical world, there is still a wide range of bad words and bad deeds, how to understand this contradiction?

Mencius holds a good standpoint on human nature and advocates the expansion and cultivation of the four-terminal mind that everyone has. At the same time, he also has a thorough consideration of evil and believes that the external environment has a major impact on people’s evil or inability to do good. For example, Mencius said: “When you are rich, your children are more dependent; when you are unlucky, your children are more violent. It is not a gift from.”

5. The Influence of Moral Luck on Confucian Destiny Thought

To sum up, the view of moral luck focuses on the internal and external conditions that a person depends on to become a morally good person. Compared with advocating the self-sufficiency of a good will, it is more important to focus on the basic conditions for a person to become a morally good person. The Confucian concept of destiny is relatively simple in the interpretation of modern scholars. By comparing the different views of Confucianism on fate, we can find that their common feature is that they advocate the basic situation of human beings, and do not want people to follow rigid moral dogma. Advocating that in an uncertain and changing world, people should stick to their confidence and principles as people, which is an understanding in the sense of existential philosophy. However, those who emphasize the “ought to” state of people regardless of their basic situation are an excessive moral requirement and should not be adopted lightly.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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