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*A HOLISTIC VIEW ON KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES*

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It seems somewhat obscure that there is a concrete connection between epistemology and ethics; a study of knowledge and a study of moral values seem to be separate because what is *true* does not necessarily mean it is *good* and vice versa. However, when we look deeper into these matters, we find that there is a connection between them. It seems possible that one can have a world-view, an epistemology per se, based on or affected by his value judgment. It seems equally possible that one's value judgment is based on or affected by the world-view that is given to him. The problem is complicated that both of them have grounds. What is determining which? What is *given* first? These questions seem to be impossible to solve the problem. For some, values are prior to knowledge *because* values are more important than knowledge. For example, they can say that knowing does not solve the problem of death that is central to the existence of humans. In other words, values are seen as more fundamental and, in a sense, more *true* than knowledge, and therefore ethics is prior to epistemology. For others, knowledge is prior to values *because* it is fundamental and thus grounds values. They will say that perception of values is itself a kind of knowledge that requires reason. This circularity is permanent, and cannot be resolved within the framework of current epistemology and ethics. There is a need for a holistic view that is entitled to neither epistemology nor ethics. In this paper, I will look for the common structure that is shared by epistemology and ethics. I will argue from meta-epistemological and meta-ethical

perspective that knowledge and values are all essentially hermeneutics of intuitions that are given prior to the division of epistemology and ethics.

For the study for a holistic view on epistemology and ethics to be possible, it is necessary to present a common factor that is at the heart for both. I argue that both epistemology and ethics have similar paradoxes within their systems that are impossible to be resolved within their own realms. While epistemology is dichotomized by two governing systems: Empiricism and rationalism, ethics also has a similar dichotomy of utilitarianism and deontology. When looked closely, one can find that they share a common problem that is not entitled to epistemology or ethics only. First, I will analyze epistemology and argue that a clear notion of intellectual intuition can help resolve the problem. Second, I will analyze ethics and argue that ethics also require an understanding of value-intuition to resolve its paradox.

## **EPISTEMOLOGY**

From the Renaissance, the history of philosophy was a history of epistemology. Philosophy was equated with epistemology that the problem of how we know things was the most important question. The division between rationalism and empiricism that came about in this era is still very relevant to this day. Their views on knowledge vary by their interpretations of knowledge as such. Rationalist and empiricist views of knowledge differ that the former views knowledge primarily as infallible while the latter sees knowledge primarily as universal. One can say that knowledge can be both infallible and universal, but the problem requires a deeper insight. Infallibility and universality seem to be irreconcilable within the framework of epistemology.

Rationalist view of knowledge as infallible is clearly demonstrated by Descartes' philosophy. He argued that knowledge must have an infallible foundation for it to be justified. In

the first meditation, Descartes plans out his method on reaching to the indubitable certainty: “I will set aside anything that admits of the slightest doubt, treating it as though I had found it to be outright false; and I will carry on like that until I find something certain” (Descartes 4). His search for certainty is on point because knowledge without justification cannot be knowledge. We do agree by common sense that we do not call what is outrightly dubitable as knowledge. We call them ‘beliefs’ or ‘opinions’. Thus, Descartes tries to find the starting point where knowledge is separated from them. This viewpoint of knowledge as essentially infallible is common in all rationalism and foundationalism in general that follows to this day. Foundationalists view knowledge as founded on basic beliefs that are self-evident. For Descartes, it is the thinking I that posits. Modern foundationalists also set the foundation of knowledge in the I because the “self-presenting state” is thought as the basic belief that is self-evident. Self-presenting state can be expressed as “this apple appears to me as red”, rather than saying “this apple is red”. Here, it is ultimately infallible because no one can deny that an apple can “appear” as red to the self. The common attitude of Descartes and modern foundationalists is that they see the self as the source of infallible knowledge while the external world is dubitable. This is the necessary logical progress when one sees infallibility as the fundamental quality of knowledge.

The problem that rationalist/foundationalist view of knowledge causes is its rejection of externality. Cartesian philosophy and its antecedents consider the self as the *source* of knowledge. However, a phenomenon cannot be a ground. Even if I observe that it is certain that I exist, it does not mean that I am the cause of the knowledge. I am merely observing that it is certain. Rationalist line of thinking results in solipsism because it rejects all external sources of knowledge as they are dubitable, and put the self as the grounding of all knowledge. One must realize that even the phenomenon of self-awareness is *given* to the consciousness. The self-knowledge of

one's own existence is a given phenomenon that is already conditioned. In order for one to know that he exists, the "I" must be objectified as "Me", and the objectified "Me" then can be given to the self. There is a sense of externality even in the self-knowledge that I must be objectified. The rationalist view of knowledge as primarily infallible is oblivious that all knowledge is essentially given from the external world other than the self.

Empiricists try to resolve this problem caused by rationalist view of knowledge that is dogmatic and solipsistic. They do so by appealing to sensual experience other than the self as the ultimate source of knowledge. They deny that there is an independent standard for knowledge apart from sensible perceptions. They appeal to the universality of sensible experience that it is given to everyone. All knowledge is a product of sensual experience of the world that is shared by all. Thus, a dogmatic view of knowledge that is confined in the self can be avoided. Modern science follows the empiricist tradition of seeing reality. It clings to observations that can be verified by everyone, and thus it sees only the material world as the candidate for scientific knowledge.

The problem that empiricism has is that knowledge cannot be grounded in cognitive faculties to retain its identity as 'knowledge' and avoid self-contradiction. The logical progress of empiricism is skepticism because sense experience is always changing. Hume's view on causality is that causality is only the habit of the mind, and that there is no such thing as cause and effect because no one can 'observe' causality: "only that when the mind experiences many similar instances, it acquires a habit of expectation: the repetition of the pattern affects it in such a way that when it observes an event of one of the two kinds it expects an event of the other kind to follow" (Hume 37). His argument leads to skepticism that denies any certainty, and it would be self-contradictory to argue for anything to be true. If all certainties that the mind think of are only

habits, there cannot be possibly a standard that is independent to assure certainty of thought. In other words, sense experience does not contain any certainty in itself. Empiricism only leads to self-destructive statement that its argument that 'every knowledge is a product of sensible perceptions' loses its ground to be true. One would only habitually think so, and therefore there is no reason to believe his argument.

Intellectual intuition is able to resolve the problem that rationalism and empiricism cannot resolve. By intellectual intuition, knowledge can be thought as both infallible and universal. What is intellectual intuition? It is difficult to answer this question. The meaning of the word 'intuition' suggests that an analysis of it is impossible because intuition is not a formal concept. Intellectual intuition is defined as the immediate understanding that does not require reasoning. It has been largely neglected by epistemology because it is similar to a feeling that is only relative and subjective, and thus not a proper source of knowledge. However, the impossibility to formally conceptualize intuition only attests that epistemology is not self-sustaining system, and thus the essence of knowledge is outside the boundary of epistemology.

The possibility of intuition rises from the a-priori contradictions that knowledge has. For example, I argue that one can intuitively know the impossibility of solipsism, that there is something outside the mind, even though it is impossible to prove so by the Cartesian method. I also argue that one can intuitively know that something has to be infallibly true, although, again, it is impossible to prove so. My argument can be summed up as this: something has to be true regardless of my knowing. There is a gap between reality and knowledge, and the knowledge of the existence of this gap is not rational but rather immediately given to the consciousness. If the existence of the schism between reality and knowledge is rationally justified, there would not be a schism, and there would be no distinction between reality and knowledge. Gettier problem

successfully sheds light on the issue that there is no rational connection between knowledge and reality. Gettier showed us that ‘a justified true belief’ could represent reality by chance. Therefore, there are scholars who even argue that knowledge is ‘lucky’ if it represents reality. However, they are unaware that knowledge and reality can have a connection by the method of intuition. If intuition is truly a mode of disclosing the truth of reality to the consciousness, then it is reasonable to say that knowledge can represent reality without luck and rational mediation between them.

## **ETHICS**

Ethics have a similar paradox that requires intuition as a method of resolving it. The two main theories of ethics, utilitarianism and deontology, are related to empiricism and rationalism as their core principles. Utilitarianism can be considered as the direct offspring of empiricism that it bases its ground on the sensible experience of pleasure and pain. It seeks to maximize the total net of pleasure or minimize the total net of pain. Deontology, on the other hand, is closer to rationalism that it bases its ground on rational principles. Its governing principle, the categorical imperative, is a duty that every rational being must do by practical reason.

The main problem of utilitarianism is its focus on consequence that enables compensating human life as only a means and not an end. This is a necessary progress of empiricism because a human being’s dignity that is infallible in all circumstances is simply untenable for empiricism. No one can ‘observe’ the dignity of human life by the senses. Therefore, there is no sense of obligation in utilitarianism. Murder is wrong only in the sense that it increases the sum of pain. Utilitarianism cannot say the gratuitous infliction of pain is inherently wrong, a view that is counter-intuitive. Deontology seeks to amend this main

disadvantage of utilitarianism that no human being can be means only. Kant does so by his famous categorical imperative: “act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law” (Kant 30). Kantian deontology successfully imports a-priori obligation that is objective. However, similar to rationalist leaning on the infallibility of knowledge and losing the external world as the sphere of knowledge, deontology seems to be at a similar situation because ethics becomes a formal science in which the real content of particular situation for a moral agent is neglected. Therefore, deontology faces a dilemma that duties can conflict with each other in real life. Also, it fails to distinguish the value of saving another’s life out of pure sympathy and love for the person, and saving another’s life out of reluctant following of duty that is imposed on the moral agent. In other words, there is no discerning of values for deontology because all duties bear the same obligation from reason. Therefore, utilitarianism seems to have an advantage over deontology in this sense that it is applicable to real life.

Max Scheler tried to resolve the paradox by retaining both objective obligation and non-formal quality of values. The paradox of utilitarianism and deontology is resolved in Scheler’s notion of *Material a-priori* in which material objects, thus non-formal, are viewed as bearers of value (Scheler 35). Scheler claims that feeling is a mode of experience that perceives values, a structure similar to cognition perceiving essence of things. He specifically points out love and hatred as the modes of intentionality to values: “They are entirely *primitive* and *immediate* modes of emotional response to the value-content itself” (Scheler 149). Scheler’s insight on value-intuition is noteworthy that values are perceived as objective, thus having obligatory power, and also that they are non-formal, thus non-rational and given immediately as feelings. Now, it is possible to resolve the paradoxes of utilitarianism and deontology that a-priori obligation can be applied to

real life. The values of objects are given to the moral agent, and therefore the conflict of duties is resolved because value-objects having higher values are directly experienced.

Is Max Scheler's non-formal ethics justified? First, it is necessary to analyze how he forms his argument. His philosophy follows phenomenological method of Husserl, but it is different to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Scheler views value-intuition as the primordial mode of perception that it is prior to perception of facticity of objects. I discussed on this matter in the beginning of the paper that there is a permanent circularity on whether values are prior to knowledge or vice versa. Scheler's view is that the world must be first *given* before it is known. He argues in his book, *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing*, that love is a "*giving of itself* or a *self revealing* of an object" (Scheler 164). The world is first given as intuitions, and this already is a condition that makes knowledge possible. And, this being given is understood as a value-saturated phenomenon that giving is only possible by love.

I agree with Scheler with his analysis of being given that it is necessarily through the emotive sphere, namely love, that the phenomena are given. I do so because the givenness of intuition surpasses the realm of knowledge. For a phenomenon to be given, it must not be known beforehand. It must be revelatory in the sense that what is given is experienced as grace. I see this fitting with the insight that phenomenology and existentialism offer to me. The world is first full of meaning by itself before it is rendered to me. I am at wonder before I gain knowledge of the world. The wonder is a feeling caused by the pouring of the phenomena to my consciousness. Thus, epistemology and ethics meet at one point. They are all essentially hermeneutics of what is given as intuitions. This should not limit to mean in a passive sense. While the givenness rouses the feeling of wonder, I still have an obligation to pursue higher values. I have an obligation to love because I am loved first. Scheler also agrees that "love itself,

in the course of its movement, is what brings about the continuous emergence of ever higher value in the object” (157). Now, there is an ontological turn that both epistemology and ethics must be understood as the relationship of the self and the world. I can know what is true and what is good only when the world is given to me, and I can pursue knowledge and values by giving myself outwards by the method of loving.

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