A Comparison of the Views of Heavenly Principles and Human Desire and the Theory of Personality Structure

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This paper makes a comparative study of the theory of heavenly principles and human desires in the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties and the theory of personality structure in psychoanalytic theory. From the perspective of the construction of the subject, in the debate between the heavenly principle and the human desire, the person is built into the moral subject. The id, ego, and super-ego in the psychoanalytic theory constitute the unconscious structural subject. In the framework of these two theories, the “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” and “the heavenly principles exist in desire” in the theory of heavenly principles and human desires express the unity of opposites between heavenly principles and human desire. The core of personality structure theory is the relationship of obedience and control among the id, ego, and super-ego. As far as the value orientation is concerned, the debate between the heavenly principle and the human desire provides a theoretical basis for the moral practice of Confucianism of “aim at absolute perfection”, while the free will of the id in the unconscious subject is the most essential ethical aspect of psychoanalysis.

Keywords: heavenly principles, human desire, personality structure, moral practice, free will

Presentation of Problems

Principle of heaven and human desires is a dominant philosophical topic for Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties. It was first proposed by Zhang Zai, and after two rounds of development, it witnessed Zhu Xi’s most detailed and complete discussion, which in turn, served as a profound legacy for later theories of Confucian moral practice. Various important scientists have conducted extensive and in-depth discussions on this topic. But at the same time, because of its slogan-style quotations, the idea of “knowing the principle of heaven and destroying human desires” has been misinterpreted by later generations and become the evidence of “murdering through reason” by popular critical science scholars. In the more mature stage of the development of science, there are two representative views, raised by Zhu Xi and Hu Hong, on the discussion of Tianli’s human desires: “preserve principle of heaven and rid human desires”, and “principle of heaven is stored in human desires”. The opposing relation between heavenly and human desires is presented. As far as the value orientation is concerned, Tianli’s desire for humanity is based on the concept of “unity of man with heaven”. It is to achieve the spiritual realm of “rest in the highest excellence” through the means of internal transcendence, highlighting the exploratory work of the Song and Ming Confucians in the field of moral practice.
Personality structure theory is the theoretical model proposed by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, based on his years of clinical practice of human unconsciousness. Freud thinks that the personality structure is composed of id, ego, and super-ego. In this trinitarian structure, the id is the foundation of the personality structure, in an unconscious state, and full of instinctual desires; the ego is a part of the id, which has its own contradiction between the id and the super-ego, looking toward the freedom of will; the super-ego is the representative of the ego, it formed through the role of identification and ego-control. It can thus be seen that the relationship between ego and superego is in the struggle of obedience and control. Psychoanalysis, as a theoretical theory with clinical practice as the ultimate goal, is not concerned with moral issues, but with the patient’s free will as its ultimate value orientation.

A comparative study of the theory of human desire of the Song and Ming Dynasties and the theory of personality of psychoanalysis can be drawn, with the issue of human desire as the source of the question and the ethics and morality as the perspective of analysis. The value orientation of the theory and the ultimate goal are the fields of practice of their respective theories. Chinese philosophy mainly focuses on moral issues, and therefore, how to handle human desires becomes a crucial part of the philosophy of life. However, in the realm of Western philosophy, the issue of desire has long been excluded from the philosophical category of rationality. The emergence of psychoanalytic theory has exerted a profound influence on various contemporary humanities fields, and during the process, the researches on desires have gradually entered the stage of contemporary philosophy. Of course, psychoanalysis is not concerned with moral issues, but it is nevertheless closely entangled with them. How to look at the psychoanalytic theory in the ethical and moral dimensions is thus the set focus of our research. In the context of this comparison, it is clear that the theoretical origins and value orientations of related issues between China and the West are clear. Therefore, the research is not solely limited to comparing or contrasting the Tianli-renyu of the Song and Ming Dynasties with the trinitarian model provided by psychoanalysis. Instead, it puts the two theories into contexts and conducts a holistic examination of the most basic starting point in the field of ethics. Our study can be discussed from three aspects: subject construction, theoretical framework, and value orientation.

The Construction of the Main Body

The concept of the subject originated from the modern Western philosophy. The “father of modern philosophy” Descartes’ famous saying “I think, therefore I am” established the basic form of the subject in theory. With the continuous development of philosophy, the concept of the subject is increasingly rich, especially under the influence of contemporary structuralism and post-structuralism. The subject is the object of being constructed. Foucault responded to Nietzsche’s question of “how a person becomes like him” with the questioning of this constructing of subject. Therefore, we first construct the subject of the two theories; the purpose of which is to put the two theories into a platform that can be dialogued, and at the same time provide a basic dimension for the subsequent theoretical analysis.

The Moral Subject of Destiny Being the Nature

In the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties, the debate of heavenly principles and human desire is an important philosophical proposition under the concept of “harmony between man and nature”. The so-called heavenly principles are the universal laws or norms of nature; the heavens represent nature or contain universal meanings, and the principles refer to the laws of things and the norms of morality. Therefore,
heavenly principle as a natural and universal law and norm is an inevitable universal law and law of the universe. The connotation of human desire is more likely to cause misunderstanding. In the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties, human desire does not refer to the instinctual desire of human beings, but refers to the pursuit beyond basic desires. Zhu Xi once said, “Regarding diets, which is the heavenly principle and which is the human desire? Demanding basic food is the heavenly principle, while demanding deliciousness is human desire” (Li, 1994, p. 224). Zhu Xi said very clearly here that in human nature, the fundamental need to be satisfied is heavenly principles, and the idea of satisfying beyond the fundamental desire is human desire, such as the pursuit of deliciousness. Therefore, it can be said that the so-called debate between heavenly principles and human desire is actually a debate between public and private. There seems to be a contradictory unity between heavenly principles and human desires. It is shown that there is a unified field as the basis of its existence and operation, and this field is the subject of modern philosophical sense. Therefore, in the unity of Taoism and humanity of “destiny being the nature”, and in the debate between heavenly principles and human desires, people are built into moral subjects, and their purpose is to provide theoretical basis for Confucian moral practice activities.

**Unconscious Structural Subject**

Freud, in his *The Ego and the Id*, asserts that the personality structure is composed of id, ego, and super-ego. The unconsciousness discovered by Freud is the cornerstone of the whole psychoanalytic theory, and the theory of personality structure is the building built on this cornerstone. Although the concept of “subject” does not appear in Freud’s writings, when we discuss the id, ego, and super-ego, we always realize that there is a so-called the “subject of self-thinking” behind the scenes, that is, “unconscious”. As Lacan said, “Freud tells us that in the human subject, there is something in the words and in the full meaning of the words, that is, there is something hidden underneath with no conscious” (Lacan, 1988, p. 194). Therefore, the “subject of self-thinking” from the perspective of psychoanalysis can be called the unconscious subject, and this subject has the structural characteristics of the trinity.

In the theory of psychoanalysis, moral issues have always been in a dilemma. On the one hand, moral conflict is the cause of the symptoms of the subject; on the other hand, the subject cannot adopt a laissez-faire attitude. Therefore, for this unconscious structural subject, we must shift from the moral dimension to the ethical dimension. Lacan once said, “Unconscious status, as I have already explained, its status is ethical, very fragile on the level of the ontology”. In the desire for truth, Freud said, “regardless of what it is, I will go there because this unconscious always shows itself somewhere” (Miller & Sheridan, 1994, p. 33). Returning to Freud’s theory of personality structure, we must pay special attention to the “id”, and “I will go there” is the ethical orientation of “id”. This ethical orientation is for the purpose of free will, pointing to the ultimate goal of psychoanalytic clinical practice.

**The Theoretical Framework**

The heavenly principles and human desire constitute a dual structure, which is a typical unity of opposites. The philosophers both emphasize the “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” from the standpoint of the opposition, and emphasize the “the heavenly principles exist in desire” from the standpoint of the unity of the two”. The id, ego, and super-ego constitute a ternary structure. The id mainly represents the original motivation in the subject, the ego reflects the will of the subject, and the more tendency of the super-ego in the subject is a function.
Unity of opposites of heavenly principles and human desire

Zhu Xi is a representative of the viewpoint of “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires”. He believes that the heavenly principles and human desires should be strictly distinguished. He said, “Human desire is the opposite of heavenly principles. It is correct to say that there is a heavenly principle and then someone wants it. But it is incorrect to say that human desire is also heavenly principle. Because in the heavenly principles, there is no human desire originally, and due to the gap between heaven and expectation, there formed a desire for humanity.” (Zhu, 1996, p. 42)

Here, in these sentences, Zhu Xi expressed three meanings. First, human desires are opposite to heavenly principles. Second, the existing logic of heavenly principles comes first, followed by the human desire. Third, the heavenly principles are just right, and if they become too many or too few, there will appear human desires. After analysis, it can be found that although Zhu Xi believes that heavenly principles are opposite to human desires, this opposition is contained in unity. In this way, the so-called “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” is very easy to understand, and the “eradicate” of desires is actually a dimension of moral practice. The purpose is to gradually “clear” human desires and present heavenly principles. At the peak of heavenly principles and human desires, Hu Hong, an important physicist of the Huxiang School, pays attention to the unity of heavenly principles and human desires, and puts forward the idea of “study in desire”. Hu Hong said, “Heavenly principles and human desires are with the same body and different use. They appear together but show different situations. To become a gentleman, it is better to study these in depth” (Hu, 1987, p. 329).

In summary, whether it is “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” or “the heavenly principles exist in desire”, the degree of thought they want to express has the same. Although Zhu Xi later criticized Hu Hong for “mixing heavenly principles with human desires”, he actually only criticized Hu Hong’s “same body”. Both views in fact express the same theme, that is, to affirm the natural desire of the moral subject, but meanwhile to standardize these desires, and the normal development of human desires will eventually approach the heavenly principles.

Control mechanism of trinity

Freud, in his The Ego and the Id, defines the task of psychoanalysis as id’s control over the ego. The ego can influence the id, and can influence the id through super-ego, but the id will ultimately control and suppress the ego, from the previous stage of obedience to control. Within the unconscious structure, the power of the id is weak, and the ability of the id is often constrained and dominated by the ego and the super-ego. However, this does not mean that the desires of ego must prevail and can be unconstrained, because the ego derived super-ego, and the super-ego will suppress the ego and control desire. Therefore, in the structure of the trinity of the subject, the ego mainly represents the original motivation in the subject, the id reflects the will of the subject, and the more tendencies of the super-ego in the subject are a function.

Regarding the operation mechanism inside the structure body, the key factor is the function of super-ego. The above has already explained Freud’s concept and function of super-ego. Post-Freud scholars extended the identity scope of super-ego, believing that super-ego is a collection of many identities, from the experience of things, fantasy and imagination, and almost all levels of development, not just those Oedipus and the former Oedipus period (Arlow, 1982). Super-ego has an aspect filled with love (Schafer, 1960). Of course, the super-ego performs more of its harsh and even cruel side. However, super-ego is not a moral code. From the
perspective of compulsoriness, it can be used as a support for moral principles, but it has nothing to do with moral standards.

For the id, the id seems to be a submissive slave to the host on the surface, but this is only a matter of expediency. The id will be enslaved and meanwhile present his will. This is also the real value of psychoanalytic theory.

The Value Orientation

We compare the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties of heavenly principles and human desires with Freud’s theory of personality structure. The ultimate goal is to compare the moral dimensions of the two theories from the perspective of value orientation. It can be said that both theories point to practice. Confucianism emphasizes moral practice, while psychoanalytic emphasizes clinical practice and ethical orientation with free will.

The Inner Transcendence of Heavenly Principles and Human Desire

In the debate between heavenly principles and human desires, people are built into moral subjects. And in the relationship between heavenly principles and human desires, whether it emphasizes “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” or “the heavenly principles exist in desire”, it aims to properly develop human desire, in order to achieve the unity of heavenly principles, and finally reach the realm of saints pursued by the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which are, doing without being reluctant, having without thinking, and naturally conforming to the principles of heaven.

Confucian moral practice is based on self-discipline and through internal transcendence in order to achieve the spiritual realm of “aim at absolute perfection”. Mou Zongsan, a representative of contemporary Neo-Confucianism, once said, “Way of heaven is both transcendental and intrinsic. At this time, it can be said to have both religious and moral meanings. Religion emphasizes transcendence, while morality emphasizes inherently righteous” (Mou, 1984, p. 30). The achievers are closer to the humanistic philosophy of the so-called “subjectivity” in the post-Kant era: “Transcendence” has become a self-transcendence to a large extent, becoming upgrade of a kind of purely subjective value (realm) (Zheng, 2001).

Thus, through the previous discussion of the subjectivity and relationships of heavenly principles and human desires, the theory of heavenly principles and human desires of Song and Ming Dynasties is the typical form of this inner transcendence. It can be argued that the internality of internal transcendence means that people are built into moral subjects, and within this subject is the unified field of Taoism and humanity; and transcendence means that moral subjects can be completed internally through moral practice of human nature. In harmony with the heavens is the so-called “following the nature which belongs to the content of the Tao” and reaching the “destiny”. Therefore, the Neo-Confucian debate of the heavenly principles and human desires is the most appropriate way to present the feasibility of internal transcendence.

Free Will of Psychoanalysis

As mentioned earlier, Freud believes that “psychoanalysis is a tool for the id to push it further toward the rule of the ego” (Che, 2014, p. 197). Therefore, the free will of the id in the unconscious subject is the value orientation of the psychoanalytic theory. But for psychoanalytic theory, since unconsciousness is an unknowable and uncontrollable force, the ability to choose freely comes from a problem that needs to be examined. This problem is also the cause of Freud’s contradiction between psychological determinism and free
will. Therefore, we must return to the essence of psychoanalysis, which is not philosophy and ethics. It aims to explain the world by means of metaphysical thinking, but with psychological clinical practice as the basic starting point and ultimate goal, just as Freud’s point of view. “The analysis is not meant to make pathological reactions impossible, but to determine one or the other way for the patient’s free will” (Che, 2014, p. 192). Therefore, the study of free will from the perspective of psychoanalysis cannot be separated from clinical practice. In the inner structure of the unconscious subject, super-ego is the id of the external world (Smee & Lucian, 1955), regardless of how powerful his law is. But it is, after all, one of the unconscious subjects of the Trinity. We still cannot ignore the role of the id. The dynamic role of id in practice will finally make the subject gain the right to freedom in treatment.

From the clinical practice perspective, at the end of a successful analysis, patients should have a certain ability to freely choose. In the process of analysis, analysts and patients conduct an adventurous work in the unconscious areas of both sides. In the interior of the unconscious subject, the desires and laws represented by the ego and the superego are uncontrollable, and the only thing that can be developed in the subject is the function of the id. Under the guidance of the analyst, the patient’s id has gained a certain degree of autonomy. The purpose is not to defeat the ego and the super-ego, but to resolve the conflicts that cause symptoms by coordinating the relationship with the super-ego, understands, identifies, and relieves the symptoms in a more harmonious way.

**Conclusions**

Through the previous discussion, on the theory of heavenly principles and human desires and personality theory, the author summed up the following conclusions (see Table 1) from three aspects, which are subject construction, theoretical framework, and value orientation.

Table 1

| Comparison of the Theory of Heavenly Principles and Human Desires and Personality Structure Theory |
|---|---|---|
| **The theory of heavenly principles and human desires** | Moral subject | Unity of opposites | The moral practice of “aim at absolute perfection” |
| **Personality structure theory** | Structural subject (Ethical attribute) | Obedience and control | The ethical orientation of free will |

First of all, as mentioned in the previous part, the main reason for constructing the subject is to put the two theories into a platform that can be dialogued, and at the same time provide a basic dimension for the later theoretical analysis. Through the analysis and interpretation of the concepts of “heavenly principles” and “human desires” in the theory of heavenly principles and human desires, it can be clearly seen that under the concept of “harmony between man and nature”, in the midst of the unity of Taoism and humanity, people are built into moral subjects, and the purpose is to provide theoretical basis for Confucian moral practice activities. And Freud’s theory of personality structure puts the id, ego, and the super-ego under the unconscious background, and in the process of pursuing the “the subject of self thinking”, it is constructed as a trinity of unconscious structural subject. In this subject, “ego” is the ethical orientation of free will, pointing to the ultimate goal of psychoanalytic clinical practice.

Furthermore, the discussion of the theoretical framework can present the original ideas of the two theories. Chinese philosophy has the concept of root theory, that is, Tai chi and yin and yang: The concept of Tai chi was
established to unify yin and yang, based on the existing Tai chi concept, and the yin and yang (Zhang, 1982). Therefore, the basic position of Chinese philosophy is the concept of dual unity of opposites. The “maintain the heavenly principles and eradicate human desires” and “the heavenly principles exist in desire” of the debate between the heavenly principle and the human desire are the theoretical arguments under this basic framework. The theory of psychoanalysis is based on the unconscious, and proposes a ternary structure system of id, ego, and super-ego, and its core is the relationship between obedience and control. The hypothesis of this theoretical framework is gradually formed during the research of long-term clinical practice to explain the mechanisms of various complex symptoms. In the structural relationship of the trinity of the subject, the id represents the original motivation in the subject, the ego reflects the will of the subject, and the more tendencies of the super-ego in the subject are a function.

Finally, the question of value orientation points to the practical aspects of these two theories. Undoubtedly, the spiritual pursuit of Confucian culture is a kind of moral idealism. The highest value of life is to establish and complete a perfect moral personality. Therefore, the ultimate concern of Confucianism is the human being, who achieves the spiritual realm of perfection through his own self-cultivation and practical wisdom, and brings some kind of recognition of the essence of human beings, the essence of the universe, and the essence of life through this moral practice. The theory of heavenly principles and human desires is the fundamental value orientation of the moral practice of “aim at absolute perfection”, and demonstrates the inherent transcendence value of Confucian moral practice. Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory established on the basis of clinical practice of psychotherapy. From the above analysis, it can be concluded that psychoanalytic concern is not morality, but the ethical orientation of the free will of the unconscious subject as its value orientation. In the relationship between the analyst and the patient, the analyst does not grasp the so-called truth, nor can he make the patient obtain the so-called happiness. What an analyst can do is to analyze and let the patient finally gain the free will.

References