

On the Demonstration of Non-Subjectivity Teleology in Responsibility Ethics

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Abstract: The non-subjectivity teleology is a very important viewpoint in Hans Jonas's responsibility ethics. The proof of non-subjectivity teleology is to describe the relationship between subjectivity and non-subjectivity as a generative relationship, thus giving the rationality of the existence of non-subjectivity purpose. However, this generative relationship inevitably leads to the idealization of methods in the subjective meeting of non-subjectivity purpose. And the biological evidence behind it to prove the existence of generative relationship is contrary to the reality of science and has logical errors.

1. Introduction

In the face of the increasing destruction of the natural environment, people can not help but ask whether we should protect the environment, that is, why people today should be responsible for the distant future generations and why we should protect nature. In his masterpiece *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for The Technological Age*, Hans Jonas (1903-1993) explains teleology and axiology. Value relies on purpose and produces responsibility. Therefore, the key point of Jonas's theory of responsibility ethics is to prove that nature (non-subjectivity) has teleology and that the proof of non-subjectivity teleology is generative theory, however, there are some points that need to be discussed and questioned.

2. A interpretation of generative theory that non-subjectivity exists purpose

The basic logic of the general argumentation of responsibility ethics can be interpreted as follows: In the face of the reality of technological alienation, human beings must develop corresponding ethical principles; Out of a sense of duty, mankind should adopt the law of suffering and enlightenment to protect nature for future generations; Human beings strengthen self-discipline, and self-restrain reckless technology abuse. Nature is undoubtedly valuable, and the value of nature is different from the value of man-made things. The value of man-made things comes from the purpose of mankind, that is, the purpose of subjectivity. However, the value of nature comes from itself, if the value of nature is also determined by human purposes, then when human purposes change, nature loses its original value and is abandoned. Therefore, demonstrating that nature (non-subjectivity) has its own purposes as well as subjectivity, the key to Jonas's responsibility ethics is that its value is eternally determined by its own purposes.

The argument of non-subjectivity teleological argument first needs to prove that subjectivity has a purpose. "The life body has the subjectivity, such subjectivity is a kind of reality", which shows that all the life body with soul attribute has the subjectivity." The subjectivity also expresses a kind of desire or intentionality, so it is always connected with the purpose. Revealing the purpose, it is the carrier of the purpose. The purpose contains in the subjectivity and relies on the subjectivity. "All organisms are the existence of the subjectivity, and its existence is its purpose. This principle is obvious, as purpose of the intention, of course, subjectivity is the product of the spirit. All life has a

spiritual attribute, so the existence of subjectivity is purposeful. The key to the question is how to prove nature, which seems to have no spiritual attributes, has a purpose. Jonas divides objective things into man-made things and natural things. Man-made things mainly consist of man-made instruments and social institutions. When we talk about man-made instruments, take the hammer as an example. the purpose of the hammer is to make people use it to hammer things, that is to say, the purpose of hammering things is contained in the hammer (belongs to the hammer), this purpose also belongs to the concept of the hammer, because this concept predates the existence of the hammer and is the cause of its creation. Ideas are the basis of objective things. Thus, man-made things and the ideas that gave rise to them were created for a purpose, which is why they exist. When we talk about social institutions, take the court as an example. Social institutions have four characteristics different from man-made things: immanency, invisibility of purpose, indivisibility of purpose and tool, visible tool implying invisible purpose, but what is more important is that both are man-made, so that the corresponding purposes given to them are also human purposes, that is, the special purposes of their makers and their users. “² This determines that man-made things have no purpose of their own, that is, that something is its own purpose. Now that we can see that the argument of man-made things is that man-made things have no purpose of their own, which means that if the purpose of man changes, man-made things like hammers and courts lose their original purpose and also their value, thus can be discarded. If natural things, like man-made things, have no purpose of their own, only external value, then man has no duty to protect nature, because we can always externally judge nature or some part of nature has no value. So it is also the existence of non-subjectivity. Natural things can not be the same as hammer or court, its existence must have its own purposes. Jonas thought that the relationship between nature and man is just like the relationship between the root and the fruit, nature produces man while the root and the stem produce the fruit, the purpose of the root and the stem are represented by the fruit while the purpose of nature is perceived by the mankind themselves. Man acts as the spokesman of the silent natural inner purpose, that is to say, non-subjectivity generates subjectivity and expresses its purpose through subjectivity. Jonas uses the metaphor of “the fruit shows what is produced by its roots and stems” to show that nature, which can not speak, is in fact a superficial generative relationship with human beings and other living beings that can speak and have mental activities, both inside and outside. Just as the traditional Chinese view of nature described the relationship between nature and man as the generative relationship of “Heavenly father and Earthly Mother” , after establishing the relationship between subjective existence and non-subjective existence, Jonas asserts that non-subjective existence, that is, nature, has a purpose, and that its purpose is revealed through subjective existence, and that only subjective existence can express and realize the purpose of non-subjective existence is real and objective.

At this point, we can see that the first key to understanding whether non-subjectivity can have a purpose is the generative relationship between subjectivity and non-subjectivity, because only by establishing the generative relationship between them, the purpose of the latter can be revealed by the former, which can be found in the history of Chinese and foreign philosophy. Western Christianity proclaims that God created man, so that man can feel God's presence, obey his call and live according to his will; While in China, living substance arise from heaven and earth, man should figure out the will of Heaven and go with it, man is the copy of the Heaven and so on. However, the generative relationship between subjectivity and non-subjectivity is not the true reflection of the relationship between man and nature. We say that the spirit of life evolved in the form of unity of opposites between the subjective being and the unconscious non-subjective being, and that the opposition produces variation and thus evolving.

3. The understanding method of non-subjective teleology is an idealist and irrational method

After the generative relation is established, whether the purpose of non-subjectivity exists or not, only subjectivity can realize and manifest, that is to say, human beings must self-understand that nature, which can not speak, is intentional and spiritual. We will recognize the value of nature is free, and then come to the conclusion of protecting nature. It is obviously difficult for subjectivity to understand the intention and purpose of non-subjectivity, and normal cognitive methods can not be

used. The trick to understanding is to use the non-rational method of idealism. Jonas describes the process “At first, the inner consciousness, the degree of consciousness, the hidden desires and even the unconscious desires and struggle are observed from what we know, that is, what we are personally aware of, so that we are able to grasp that they always point to a variety of purposes and objectives.....The principle of continuity requires us to acknowledge an interminable veil, in which the concrete subjectivity does disappear somewhere, but similar feelings and desires are not likely to disappear.....Something similar must have brought it from a dark corner into the sunlight.”³ A way that seems like mysterious, in fact, is the inner view of the mind. How can the person of subjectivity realize that the nature of non-subjectivity also has the purpose or desire of subjectivity? Starting from the normal cognition of human beings, looking into the heart and examining the spiritual activities, we will find that all spiritual activities have a purpose, and then we will enter into some mysterious realm, where the subjective consciousness of human beings no longer exists. However, we can feel the similar desire purpose still exists. The purpose of this state does not come from subjectivity, but from non-subjectivity, because it is non-human existence. This kind of idealist and irrational cognitive method is widely used in Zen Buddhism and poetry aesthetics. In Meditation, logical thinking is interrupted, the continuity of time and space is interrupted, the perceptual experience is directly transcended, and the mind is directly aware of the identity of man and nature. Jonas apparently believes that only in such a state can a man of subjectivity realize that nature, which is not subjective, also has subjectivity, and that “the mountain seems to have spirituality at this time”. Jonas's methods are irrational, cognitive, even inarticulate, and prone to fall into the religious category. Because the mind is so important for understanding the purpose of non-subjectivity, Jonas goes on to say more about the mind. According to Jonas, “the mind may be an appendage to all matter in a generalized form.....Actively interchanging with the 'independent' life form around them. So the original subjectivity comes into being, which can be attributed to the mind kingdom that pervades beneath the material, either as a kind of subjectivity without a subject, or as an impersonal subject that can be called nature”.⁴ Obviously, Jonas believed that the mind, that is, the spirit, was a kind of independent factor that pervaded the natural world and actively interchanged with independent living beings to produce subjectivity, and that this independent factor was the subjective existence without subject. “It exists within a diffuse primeval desire which, in turn, exists in innumerable individual particles, and does not exist in the primeval unity of subjectivity (that is, the idea of God, deity and so on) , which is apparent in metaphysics. These distinct units, whether organic or inorganic, are a predetermined result.”⁵ From the above discussion, we can see that Jonas, in order to prove that non-subjective nature has its own purpose and value, adopts the Idealism method of inner reflection in cognitive method. In order to further explain the logic and rationality of epistemology, Jonas goes to objective idealism on ontology.

4. The biological evidence for the generative relationship does not conform to scientific cognition

Jonas's non-subjective teleology has aroused many doubts since it was put forward, and its supporters point out that the contemporary Autopoiesis can be an important biological evidence to prove teleology. The core of Autopoiesis is that life is a self-generating system, that is, a self-reproducing system that produces itself. A single cell of minimal living tissue has a function of self-producing cycle, the cell is constantly undergoing metabolism, self-replication, and Autopoiesis describes this process and suggests that there may be mutations in the process of self-production of cells. Through genetic mutations, single-celled tissue is upgraded to multi-celled tissue, and multi-celled tissue is constantly replicating itself, so multi-celled tissue is also a self-generating system, and ultimately all living things are a self-generating system. Autopoiesis itself is a biological theory, and the biological evidence for non-subjective teleology is based on the interpretation that life is a self-reproducing system, and that self-reproduction of a single-celled creature produces a multi-celled creature. A multi-celled creature evolves into a subjective existence through the same automatic process of development that combines psychic factors. This process is a “generative process”, in the process, “self-production is really self-affirmation, which shows that life is closely

related to the fundamental purpose of maintaining one's identity.....When we even put the autonomy of the smallest cell body at the center, we discover an internal teleology in two complementary ways. “⁶ An unconscious single cell constantly replicates its own function or process, which shows that single cell also has a purpose, embodied in the constant affirmation of the self. Thus it can be seen that life entity that constitutes the nature, whether conscious or unconscious, have a purpose naturally, and that every living thing has a purpose for itself and life is an end in itself. Nature is a living system made up of all organic and inorganic substances, and therefore nature also aims at its own existence.

First, the self-replicating behavior of life can not be assumed to be purposeful. In 2010, scientists at Michigan State University used computer to stimulate and reconstruct the evolution of life. They used computer to stimulate and create a digital life form called Avetiens. The digital creatures that live in computers reproduce themselves not by DNA but by computer code. At the beginning of the experiment, Avetiens was designed with a string of cells, and the scientists gave it different kinds of food to observe the results of its processing. After 100 generations of self-destruction, a mutation that gives the Avetiens cell string a code that directs it to get more food. The new cell replicates faster and thus has more offspring than other cells. Over thousands of generations, Avetiens evolved primary memory, and later experiments increase more complex instructions. The experiments found that Avetiens could evolve more complex memories. “Researcher Laura Gradsky says that, environmental settings bring selection pressure and Avetiens is forced to form a memory function.”⁷ The scientific experiment, which perfectly represent Autopoiesis. Can we conclude that digital also has subjective purpose based on thereproduction process that Avetiensexists self-affirming? The process of single cell self-replication, mutation and muti-cell evolution into biology is only the oppression of the external environment. It is the passive result of survival of the fittest in natural selection, not the seed that was planted in advance to create consciousness. The mistake of trying to prove non-subjective teleology with the theory of biology is that the relationship between human and nature can not be understood as the relationship between fruit and root, nor as the relationship of generation. The biological logic of using the son's DNA to prove the mother's DNA does not apply to the relationship between man and nature.

Second, the widespread use of Autopoiesis in social systems can also disprove the mistake of the idea that self-replication embodies purposes. The self-organization theory, which appeared in the 20th century, is the application of Autopoiesis in social system. It studies how the system automatically moves from disorder to order and from low to high under certain conditions. There are four key conditions for a self-organizing system, openness, distance from equilibrium, nonlinear coherence, and random fluctuations, which means that in any case, we only need to provide these four conditions, aAutopoiesis self-organizing system can be generated. It can automatically self-renew and continuously develop, and even there also will be sudden changes to upgrade the organizational structure. Take the common self-organization system in colleges and universities -- Student Learning Organization as an example. It develops itself, just like a living creature through the mutation process of interest groups (single-celled creatures) , academic societies (muti-celled creatures) , and student innovation practice centers (intelligent creatures). According to teleological interpretation, this kind of constant self-production and self-development is self-affirmation, which shows that life has a close relationship with the fundamental purpose of maintaining its own identity. The logical conclusion is the interest group, the “single-celled creature” itself has its own purpose, its existence does not need external value affirmation. But when we connect with Jonas’s analysis of the purpose of man-made things, we find that Jonas had already concluded that any man-made thing is a purposive entity, whose purpose is set and owned by man and has no purpose of its own. So here we can see that it is not enough to prove the teleology of non-subjectivity only by the self-replication of biological theory, and the logical result is contradictory.

5. Conclusion

Mankind has only one earth. There is a contradiction between theoretical logic and practical conflict in the proof of purpose in Hans Jonas’s responsibility ethics. However, it is self-evident that human beings are responsible for nature. The greater the capacity, the greater the responsibility. The

traditional Chinese thought of “Poverty is good for itself, while attainment is good for the world at the same time” also provides a new cultural perspective on whether human beings should protect nature, which deserves our in-depth consideration.

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