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Evolution of philosophy from Greek to postmodern: A debate

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Abstract

This paper highlights a brief overview on the genesis of philosophy begins with Ancient Greece and continues until the present-day world of Postmodernism. The overall aim of this paper is to briefly unfold some profound interpretation that may help the readers to understand the evolution of philosophy and its changing meaning from time to time. A method of induction and deduction has been used all-over the paper to implicitly reflect all the philosophical doctrines and tenets of various philosophical traditions. The primary and secondary sources in the form of books have been used to frame this paper in a logical manner. Broadly speaking, this paper has started with Heraclitus concept of 'Flux' and ended with Lyotard conception of 'Metanarratives'. This paper may help the readers, teachers, researchers in particular and people in general to understand the nature and evolutionary perspective of philosophy at a glance.

Keywords: evolution, philosophy, modern, postmodern, metanarrative

Introduction

The study of philosophy has always been taken an important place among all disciplines, because it is imperative to know the genesis/foundation of every subject. Directly or indirectly all subjects are linked with philosophy. Starting from the literal or derivational meaning of philosophy people have unanimously accepted that philosophy means "Love for wisdom", but no one try to understand how this theoretical definition can be realized practically. Here, we are not claiming the same but trying to convey that other meaning of philosophy may possible such as, "Love for learning; love for knowledge; love for simplicity; love for clarity; love for multiplicity and many more. The main focus here is to see and understand philosophy from a changing and diverse perspective. The entire paper has been presented in a simple way to shed light on different perspectives of philosophers belonging to different ages. It may help the readers to deconstruct the gist and guiding tenets of all philosophical tradition starting from Greek to Postmodern philosophy.

Objective of the Paper

To explore the evolutionary perspective of philosophy.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

All the arguments and analysis of this paper was made by studying number of books relating to Greek, Roman, Medieval, Islamic, Renaissance, Modern, Analytic, and Postmodern philosophy.

Rationale of the Study

Rethinking of nature, formation, standard and value of knowledge is a matter of question in this phenomenal world. Due to the development of science, social progress, and technological upliftment the nature and usefulness of knowledge and value is continuously shifted from the historical Greek philosophy to renaissance and later on modern to postmodern. Here, the researcher has not found any such literature that sheds light on the evolution of philosophy.

Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to show the change that has taken place from Greek philosophy right up until the present-day world which justified the rational of the work.

Method of justification

In this paper both inductive and deductive method have been used to represent philosophers and their major philosophical ideas in a systematic manner.

Evolutionary Perspective of Philosophy

The study of philosophy has been continuously evolving and changing into new forms since the origin of Greek philosopher Thales to the postmodern philosophy of Fredrick Jameson. During this evolutionary process drastic changes, new world views, knowledge formation, nature of knowledge, values creation, beliefs, traditions and many more things would have altered and come out in a refined way but philosophical studies were remained progressive. Although, philosophy is the heart of all subjects but the socio-cultural perspectives of the philosophers would make this branch of study more practical and productive. However, a brief but thorough discussion of all such changes have been explored here to convey how changes were seen rapidly in philosophy starting with Greek philosophy onwards.

Greek Philosophy

The Greek philosophy was started around 600 BC. Empedocles, Parmenides, Protagoras, Heraclitus, Thales, Democritus, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are the prominent figures for the development of Greek Philosophy. All the philosophers of this age have contributed a lot to study about the nature of human beings, moral concepts such as ethics and aesthetics, values, logic, politics, mathematics, metaphysics, ontology, virtues, concept of ideas and knowledge, etc. Probably, all have influenced by the impact of the Western worlds, it's art, culture, knowledge and so on. Many of the above cited philosophers have considered 'Reason' as the most vital aspect of a human being to understand and justify all abstract phenomenon of this universe in an uncomplicated way. Heraclitus's idea of "Flux" or "Change" or "Becoming"; Thales philosophy of "Ultimate substance"; Democritus theory of "Atoms"; Pythagoras on "Mathematics and Geometrical theorems"; Socrates's ethical doctrine based on "Reason and desire"; Plato's theory of "Concept and ideas" and lastly Aristotle views on values, ethics, politics, physics, astronomy, etc. have opened the path for the progress of Greek philosophy in general and world philosophy in particular.

Roman Philosophy

The Roman philosophy was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. Cicero, Hypatia, Plotinus, Lucretius, Philo, Carneades, Diogenes, and Critolaus were the most profound philosophers in the Roman philosophical tradition. The central theme of this philosophical tradition is based upon "God" and "Reason". They strongly believe in the existence of supreme almighty god who governs this world and also consider that through the power of reasoning a man could achieve everything in lives. In spite of this, roman philosophy has a major contribution towards arts and politics. For instance, the European constitutions and some

of its laws are derived from the Romanian ideologies, similarly, the modern days restaurants, banks, buildings, statues are constructed with reference to Roman arts (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). "Stoicism" and "Epicureanism" are two important school found during this period that helps to comprehend the ethical ideas prevalent in Greeko-Roman cities, on the other side Serbian and Proculean schools of law also helps to grasp the legal system of this tradition.

Islamic Philosophy

The Islamic philosophical tradition was started around 900 AD and lasted till 12th century. Al-Kindi was the first philosopher of Islamic tradition or so called "the first philosopher of Arab", who concerned with the study of dialectic theology, astrology, medicine, and arithmetic. Except Al-Kindi, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Ghazali have also played a key role for the development of this philosophy. (Henry Corbin, 2014) ^[4] History of Islamic Philosophy Basically, the proponents of Islamic philosophy describe about the creation and the creator of this universe. They use 'reason' as an important source of Islamic law by which all Quranic doctrines and ideas would be practically justified. Inductive logic and Syllogism of Aristotle are usually used by the philosophers in order to engage themselves in philosophical debates and discourses. Simply speaking, the entire philosophical tradition of Islam is centered around the ideologies of 'Quran' where people are following the way prescribed by the god i.e. 'Allah'. The Qur'anic knowledge has been taken as the highest form of acquiring to understand the unity of god with man and with the universe. Therefore, the etymological meaning of "Islam" is "Total submission to the will of god". There is a strong belief in Islam called as "Five pillars of Islam" which constitutes 'Belief', 'Worship', 'Fasting', 'Almsgiving', and 'Pilgrimage'.

Medieval Philosophy

The Medieval period was continued to last until 1500 AD. Roughly saying, when the Roman empire started declining this medieval philosophy would emerge out to restore the cultural tradition developed in Greece and Rome (Spade, Paul Vincent 2008) ^[14]. Medieval philosophy gives stress on theological studies (Klima *et al.* 2007) ^[9]. Medieval philosophy: Essential reading with commentary. Philosophers of this age are basically concerned with the works of Aristotle and Plato. Moreover, they try to elaborate the power of reason, the existence of god, theology and metaphysics, question of knowledge, the creation of universe (Gracia and Noone, 2003) ^[7]. There is a believe among the philosophers of this era i.e. "Truth can be discovered through logic and dialectics". St. Augustine, Boethius, Avicenna, St. Anselm, Averroes, Moses Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, Desiderius Erasmus are the leading philosophers of this age. Each of all branches of philosophy today have been a part of the Medieval philosophy. Theological subjects like religion, god, supreme being, divine knowledge; metaphysical concepts like existence, theory of causation, universe; effect of mathematics and Science on philosophy; new logical developments and inquiry; ethical considerations, concept of 'intentionality' and mental representation are the major areas whereby most of the philosophers of this period have given their individualistic remarks.

Renaissance Philosophy

The name "Renaissance philosophy" is first used by intellectual history scholars that refers to the development of new thoughts and ideas in Europe between 1355 and 1650. The Renaissance literally means "Revival of classical civilization and learning" (Schmitt and Copenhaver, 1992) ^[13]. This period is also called as the beginning of science and technology. Skilled men and women have played a vital role for the outgrowth of this movement in philosophy. The prominent philosophers like, Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, Rene Descartes and many others have supplemented a lot through their works and arguments. Machiavelli views that, "The end determines the means". It simply tells the end goal is more important than its means (ways). Bacon believes "Knowledge is power" is quite applicable at all aspects of life because knowledge is the most precious wealth of a human being which makes himself powerful in every situation. The famous philosopher of this period, Rene Descartes has started to search his existence with a "doubt". Thus, "I think therefore I am" is the founding principle of his philosophy. Humanism and Political philosophy are two important concern areas of this philosophical tradition. However, metaphysics, Aristotle's logic, ethics, knowledge are also some relevant points where many of the philosophers have debated. This period is called as the age of discovery, however, architecture, fine arts, literature, music, dance, drama, etc. are also given utmost priority.

Modern Philosophy

The era of modern philosophy began after Renaissance and lasted till the mid end of 20th century. During this period the entire philosophical tradition has been divided into two groups which are: "The rationalist" and "The empiricists". Rationalists view that "Reason alone is only a chief source of acquiring and justifying knowledge" (Lacey, 1996) ^[10], in contrary to this the empiricists state that "Sensory experience is the gateway of knowledge" (Psillos and Curd, 2010) ^[12]. Rene Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Malebranche are some of the rationalists, on the other hand John Locke, Bacon, Berkeley and Hume are empiricists. And they all belong to the philosophy of modernism. The belief in god is still taken an important place in modernity, thus, Spinoza asserts "Causa sui" means "God is the cause of all cause" (Spinoza, 1677). The father of modern philosophy Rene Descartes's 'theory of innate ideas' refers to the pre-existence of ideas at the time of birth has been vehemently criticized by John Locke. For Locke, "Mind is tabularasa or clean slate" and knowledge only comes from experience (Locke, 1689). The entire modern philosophy is standing upon some remarkable ideas such as, Scientific knowledge, objective truth, transcendental reality, universal values, morality, order and coherence, reasoning, singularity, progress, concept of god, supernatural phenomenon, ethics and aesthetics.

Analytic Philosophy

The modern philosophy has opened the pathway for genesis of analytic school of philosophy. This tradition begins with the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein's first book 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus' where he mentions meaning of any concepts can be possible through the analysis of language. He believes the aim of philosophy is not to discover truth but to solve the complications and dilemmas that existed in

the language system (Wittgenstein, 1922) ^[16]. After Wittgenstein, this tradition was being shaped by two other philosophers namely, Bertrand Russell and George Edward Moore. In the book 'The Principia Mathematica' Russell tries to convey that mathematics has a logical structure that gives clarity to phenomenon, similarly, language system has also a logical structure which needs to be unfolded for solving the intricacy of language (Whitehead & Russell, 1910) ^[15]. Moore's work of 'Principia Ethica', and his conception of 'meta-ethics' and 'naturalistic fallacy', is brought some noteworthy influence on the analytic philosophers. Basically, the analytic philosophers are concerned with analysis of language, theories, laws, concepts, and scientific phenomenon. In 1920, a new philosophical movement has been developed in Vienna, and later on in the year 1929 this movement shaped into a new form called "Vienna Circle". Among Moritz Schlick, Herbert Feigl, Felix Kaufmann, Rudolph Carnap and many others the contribution of A J Ayer is immeasurable. This new movement is highly influenced by the work of Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus" and Russell's "Principia Mathematica". They believe that scientific knowledge is always true because science is based on experimentation, verification, observations, demonstration on the other side all metaphysical phenomenon, doctrines, assumptions are not based on scientific principles. Thus, a British philosopher named David Hume has for the first time criticized metaphysics and claimed that metaphysical doctrines need to be rejected because its principles are not based on experience.

Philosophy of structuralism

Structuralism is one of the most influential intellectual movements in the twentieth century which embraces a wide variety of disciplines such as, linguistics, philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, anthropology, and psychoanalysis. Back to Ancient Greek philosophy the famous philosopher Aristotle who for the first time talks about 'the structure of tragedy' in his poetics. For Aristotle tragedy has six elements: 'plot', 'character', 'diction', 'thought', 'spectacle' and 'song'. After Aristotle, around 1920 this tradition was started with the works of Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguistic and philosopher who claimed that everything of this world is made up of a structure and it is quite essential to understand the structure first to manifest the meaning. Through his continuous reading of Indian grammarians-cum-philosophers namely, Patanjali and Panini. According to Saussure knowledge is constructed through language, so to gain knowledge we need to understand the language because language determines thoughts. He is often called the father of modern linguistics. In his book "Course in general linguistics", he claims language should be analyzed in terms of its internal structure. Further, language is a system of signs consisting of a signifier (Spoken word or sound) and a signified (Mental concept). Signs do not designate an external reality or referent and are meaningful only because of the similarities and differences that exist between them. Ronald Barthes another Structuralist of this age who opines that the overall aim of structuralism is to develop a universal productive theory of signs applicable to all areas of human activity. Another important Structuralist Claude Levi - Strauss in his book 'Myth and Meaning', he asserts all regions have a common myth or structure that people of all religions may worship god in various forms, but they

believe this world is created by god. Shifting from literature to philosophy, structuralists are of view that the entire discipline of philosophy is also made of a structure which consists of ideas, concepts, doctrines, assumptions, theories, etc.

Philosophy of Post-Structuralism

Post-Structuralism is a philosophical and intellectual movement that developed in France around 1960. This philosophical movement is developed as a reaction against structuralist movements. Structuralists claim meaning is fixed, absolute and there is a structure which is followed by language, on the other hand poststructuralists have negated all what was said by structuralists and viewed that meaning and structure is not so absolute and constant. Long back to Jacques Derrida, one of the founder fathers of Post-structuralism who for the first time invited to John Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA in 1966 to present a paper at the conference titled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man". In this conference Derrida presented a paper on "Structure, Sing, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science". This paper has shaken the entire philosophical tradition of structuralism because Derrida first time questioned about the "Structurality of the structure". Hence, it is said that from this day the actual philosophical movement of Post-structuralism begun. Except Jacques Derrida other philosophers of this age are Michel Foucault, Ronald Berthes, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler who have committed with Post-structuralism. Post-structuralists believe in the fact that meaning is constantly changing and evolving. For Jacques Lecan, another thinker of this period who says there is a constant sliding of signifier and signified and we cannot reach the ultimate signified because every signifier is leading to another signifier then to another signifier and we will not reach the signified at all. Similarly, in philosophy one idea or concept leads to another so in this way no idea is ultimate there is always a possibility of change in understanding, speculating, analyzing, and synthesizing. Philosophers have said a beautiful line that "You can never dive into the same river twice", what is meant by this line? It simply tells, water is ever flowing this is what Post-structuralists are trying to clarify. Eventually, last but important tenet of this philosophy is to break the binaries such as theory/practice, men/women, black/white, rich/poor, science/arts, heterosexual/homosexual, etc.

Age of Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a philosophical movement that comes into light after second world war or around 1945 in France. Particularly, this movement has brought out as a critical retaliation to five main modern philosophical ideas such as, 1) Excessive faith on god, 2) Faith on king, 3) Faith on human mind, 4) Faith on democracy, and 5) Faith on Science. In general, it can be called as the five pillars of modernism that people would blindly rely on. Starting with the first pillar 'Enormous faith on god' for first time Charles Darwin has presented a paper in 1859 entitled "Evolution of species" where it is clearly mentioned that there is no involvement of god in the evolution of species like human beings. For Darwin, Human being is evolved in a natural process and a natural adaptation. This is the first point where people believe on god and religion is shaken. Second, if we look at Aristotle's Poetics or any other philosophers

book it is found that god has appointed king to rule on his behalf. So, next to god is king whose authority cannot be challenged just like god but when Karl Marx came out with his "The Communist Manifesto" he was vehemently criticized the hierarchy that existed in the society and said the hierarchy of king, middle class, lower class should be diminished. Further, he says there should be public property and not be any private property and no private ownership of good, this is the time when people have lost their faith on king, thus, the second pillar "Faith on king" is also lost. Third one "Faith on human mind" which is based on Man's power and potential is also challenged when Psychoanalytic Sigmund Freud came with his book "The Interpretation of Dreams" he has talked about the model of consciousness and said consciousness is structured like an iceberg and we only see 10% that is the conscious level. There is a lot of unconscious and sub-conscious functioning which we cannot see, so all our actions are based on the 10% of the consciousness and rest 90% we don't have any control on. Thus, "Faith on human mind" is lost when people would come to know about this model of Consciousness. Fourth, an important institution that people believe is "Faith on democracy" but when the First World War fought in 1914 people of this entire world would have experienced the adverse effect of it. A lot of soldiers were killed, widespread blood shed took place and then this world war first which is fought in the name of democracy has come out with no result or no conclusion. After this war people would start questioning about the institution of democracy and their faith in democracy is questionable. People believe that they have power to speak, they are liberated and free but then it is democracy which responsible for world war I. Hence, there faith in democracy is also broken. Finally, the last pillar of "Science" is also jolted because there was a time when scientific inventions were taking place and people would have a lot of believe in science but then the atomic bombs were made during second world war which could destruct an entire city namely, "Hiroshima and Nagasaki". Then people would realize what bad science could do because science gives birth to technology, in the world war I and II many new technological instruments were used that led to destruction. For the first time in this two-war people would be able to see the negative impact of science so their faith in science is also shaken. After broken down all pillars of modernism still writers and philosophers of this age are searching for solutions but on the other hand postmodernists do not prioritize on searching solutions. They believe "problematization of problems", they embrace contradictions and discuss about problems only (Beckett, 1954) [3].

Ending Remarks

The postmodern philosophy was raised against the modern philosophy. As a result, the important tenets of modernism such as universal truth, absolutism, fixed values, unified and coherence theories, structural understanding of things and objects, emancipation through reason, human progress through science and technology have lost its importance over human beings. Conversely, the postmodernist like Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Jameson, Lacan have appreciated and advocated new ideas such as fragmentation, multiplicity, subjectivity, localism, indeterminism, pluralism, perspectivism, micro-narratives, changing value, ruptures and breaks in history, no absolutism and no fixed

structure, etc. to answer the questions asked by modern scientists and philosophers. However, the evolutionary aspect of philosophy revealed that some philosophers interpreted the way and nature of philosophy in their own way on the other hand, some tried to change the horizon of philosophy as well as the direction of society through their critical thinking.

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