

Research Article

# The Interpretation of Role Model and Its Contemporary Value Under Kant's Moral Education Thought

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## Abstract

Kant's moral education ideology is an important component of his entire ideological system and a brilliant gem in the history of human educational thought. Kant's moral education philosophy is mainly reflected in stimulating the intrinsic moral motivation of the educated and cultivating their kind will, advocating for the construction of moral freedom and spiritual meaning based on the principle of formality and universality as the basis for their own will. However, the current moral education in schools is still fundamentally based on material practical principles such as utilitarianism, emotion, self love, and reputation, which leads to low efficiency and formalization of moral education practice. In this sense, moral education cannot truly cultivate the sense of responsibility and obligation of the educated, let alone generate a Kantian sense of moral respect and sublimity from the depths of their hearts. The author believes that universities can change the way learners think and enhance people's moral motivation through the role of role models in moral education. By playing a role model, laying the foundation for the construction of ideas, and then making free choices, true freedom can be achieved. This article analyzes the connotation and characteristics of exemplary education in Kant's educational philosophy based on current research experience and relevant academic literature, and further explains the role of exemplary education in Kant's moral education philosophy. Finally, combining the role of role models, this paper focuses on exploring the contemporary value of the concept of role models in Kant's moral education ideas, aiming to draw on the essence of Kant's role model education and promote the reform and innovation of moral education in Chinese universities.

## Keywords

Kant, Moral Education Thought, Example, Values

## 1. Introduction

Kant, one of the great philosophers in human history, was a pioneer of German classical philosophy. [1] He wrote several representative works such as Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Judgment. [2] Kant's philosophy, also known as critical philosophy, mainly deals with the problem of "what is man". [3] In Kant's thought of

moral education, he emphasizes that the secret of being human lies in moral education. The "example" is discussed in many aspects in Kant's works. At present, the study of model in Kant's moral education is mainly empirical model, but the study of pure model is relatively few. Scholar Liu Fengjuan points out that the experiential model and the pure model are

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the indispensable elements of Kant's moral education thought, and there is unity between them. Zhu Yi critically reflects on the basis of the existence of "moral example" and its theoretical limits. Zhang Lin believes that model education plays an important role in the moral education of Chinese teenagers. [4] Under the guidance of Kant's critical philosophy, moral education is regarded as the highest level of education. In the process of carrying out moral education, Kant thinks that giving play to the exemplary and leading role of example lays the thinking foundation for constructing thinking. Under the guidance of the example, the educatees consciously and voluntarily learn and imitate, and finally internalize the spiritual quality obtained from the example in their hearts, and then form their own moral personality. Some scholars also pointed out that the model referred to by Kant should be the prototype of moral concept, the embodiment of moral ideal, the model followed by the public, and the model of moral education. [5] In short, in today's era of instrumental rationality, how to scientifically understand and play the role of example is of great significance to promote the reform and innovation of moral education in our country.

## 2. The Connotation of Kant's Thought of Model Education

In the process of the implementation of Kant's moral education thought, guided by example at the beginning, it promotes the construction of the educatees' thinking and free choice, and finally realizes the establishment of freedom. The role model plays an important role in the process of the characteristics of Kant's model education thought. Scholar Liu Fengjuan elaborated on the characteristics of Kant's model education thought, which has the characteristics of universal legislation, man is the goal and will self-discipline. [6] To be specific:

First, the emphasis on universal legislation Kant pointed out that both the exercise of free action and the imitation of the action of others should be based on norms that can become universal laws. If the code of conduct does not conform to the universal law, it can only reflect the likes and dislikes of individuals, which is the manifestation of their own selfish interests, and is no different from the behavior of other animals. [7] Therefore, people should try to emulate the universal legislative will, which is an effective way to maintain personal dignity.

Second, the "man is the end" principle. All human beings are rational beings in society, working towards an end, not simply instruments dictated by some will. [8] In all actions, whether they exist for themselves or for some other reason, they are regarded as ends in all circumstances. At every occasion and at every point in time, man's actions must regard his own humanity and that of others as ends, not as means.

Third, self-discipline of will. Only the realization of will self-discipline, can reflect the meaning of moral value, will to obey the law based on reason, cannot be disturbed by external

factors, so as to reflect the value of human beings, to achieve the purpose of maintaining dignity, which means that the role model to rely on will self-discipline to play a role, in order to get the learner's recognition and acceptance, become a moral personality. [9]

## 3. The Role of Role Model Under Kant's Moral Education Thought

In the process of implementing moral education, we should take some compulsory measures, but we can not protect the freedom of educators, which is an unbreakable problem. Kant believes that in order to resolve this conflict, it is necessary to give play to the role of example, lay the foundation for the construction of thinking, and then make free choices to realize the real freedom. [10] The role of example is particularly evident in children's moral education. This paper interprets the role of example in combination with the moral education for children.

### 3.1. Evaluate with the Moral Code as a Reference to Cultivate Children's Moral Judgment Ability

Guide children to discover the highest moral code by example, and hone children's rationality and judgment. For example, in children's daily moral education, it is necessary to rationally face the role of role models, cultivate children's moral judgment, so that they can have a rational understanding of correct moral concepts, the purpose is to evaluate with the reference of moral laws, to observe the free action of others while acting freely, and gradually form such a habit. And before the action to ask whether it is in line with the moral law, careful analysis of what kind of moral law, in order to promote the improvement of the ability to judge. Professor Deng Xiaomang of the Philosophy Department of Huazhong University of Science and Technology emphasizes that moral education refers to the internal inspiration of human rational nature, while in the process of implementing moral education, people can understand the universal law of reason from the emotional encouragement of example.

In the process of implementing moral education for children, it is necessary to guide them to keep calm during observation, not only to implement emotional incentives, but also not to force children to worship moral role models. Instead, it is necessary to rationally analyze the words and deeds of moral models, analyze the corresponding moral code for each legitimate action, and judge whether they have the subjectivity to abide by moral laws. Whether there is a pure moral intention. [11] Therefore, parents and teachers should always set a good example for their children. They are still immature in all aspects of childhood and childhood, lack of clear and accurate judgment on moral affairs. The combination of the role of example and the characteristics of children's strong

imitation ability will play an important role in the moral cultivation of children.

### 3.2. Take Moral Example as Auxiliary Means to Stimulate Children's Sense of Rational Duty

In the implementation of moral education with children as the object, educators guide children to understand the process of establishing the moral value of any kind of behavior by using moral examples as auxiliary means under the premise that they have a clear understanding of moral examples. As educators themselves must establish the reasons for moral example, to avoid blind application of moral example and misleading children. When implementing moral education to children, if the wrong approach is taken, it may have the opposite effect. For example, blindly quoting moral examples may lead to misdirection of children. For example, when children with good behavior are compared with those with poor behavior, some children may resent the role models. As scholar Zhu Yi puts it, "A good model (exemplary transformation) should not serve as a model, but only as a proof of the feasibility of something that meets the obligation." [12] In short, as a means of vice president, example can promote the formation of children's sense of obligation, but it may also mislead children, thus affecting the formation of independent and free moral personality.

## 4. The Contemporary Value of the Role of Example Under Kant's Moral Education Thought

To give full play to the role of example in the process of carrying out moral education in the present era, it is necessary to deeply interpret and analyze the thoughts and opinions of Kant's model education. The contemporary value of the role of example in Kant's moral education is mainly embodied in:

### 4.1. Adequate Respect Should Be Given to Human Nature, Freedom, Life and Rights

Kant believes that freedom and self-discipline are closely related and equated between the two. In his view, freedom is a key concept in the process of elucidating the self-discipline of the will. Kant clearly pointed out that if self-discipline is only based on freedom, it becomes the subject of moral law. [13] Therefore, the dignity of legislation is inviolable, has irreplaceable value and needs unconditional obedience. Only it can be called "rational content" and "respect" can be applied. Therefore, self-discipline is the source of human dignity. In the process of implementing moral education, reliance on administrative means is formed, and learners are bluntly required to learn from role models. In the process of implementing role model education, this way has obvious administrative color, ignoring people's

basic rights, ignoring people's freedom, depriving the education object of the right to imitate the role model in his own mind, and not allowing them to learn freely. The self-conscious and voluntary ability of moral subjects is gradually dissipated, it is difficult to cultivate independent personality, and the model education fails to achieve the expected effect and deviates from the right direction. Therefore, in the process of implementing model education, we should fully realize that complexity and diversity are the basic characteristics of human beings, and we should give people the right to learn from the example, not to point out the way for them, let alone interfere with them. Therefore, the model education should be based on respect, and should give sufficient respect to human nature, freedom, life and rights.

### 4.2. Always Maintain Respect for Reason

Reason is fundamental in itself, but man is not an instrument of the will. In the analysis of the nature of human nature, dignity is the most important content, because all people do not want to be used as a means of profit by others. No matter what the circumstances, human development should be regarded as the purpose of using all tools, which is the embodiment of human dignity. Kant said that no matter to oneself or others, no matter what kind of behavior is taken, people should be regarded as the first purpose, all things in the world, only useful to people is valuable, without people, all things lose value. Pure needs, pure hobbies, if set aside reason, its value is difficult to realize. [14] As rational beings, human beings cannot be controlled by needs, preferences, etc. Kant repeatedly emphasized that man should be endowed with a subject status and that man is a rational being. In his view, all rational things should regard themselves as legislators in the kingdom whose fundamental purpose is to realize the freedom of will under any circumstances. Since all people are rational beings, they should consciously and voluntarily choose a "moral life", which should bring enlightenment to the education of example, and both the educator and the educated should consciously and voluntarily make such a choice. As an educator, we should take ourselves as a role model, live a moral life, and find ways to unify the students' conviction with our own. Otherwise, we can only use the example as a warning to the students, or simply set up some models worthy of praise and admiration and noble qualities for the students, and simply think that just instilling enthusiasm can make the students establish a good impression on these models, but it will backfire. Therefore, the effective model education should always be rational, to guide students to have a strong conscious awareness, to establish rational cognition, only in this way, in order to let the good will of the model, good values into their own beliefs and beliefs, and constantly strengthen the voluntary consciousness, to achieve the purpose of unity of knowledge and action.

### 4.3. Maintain Respect for the Objective Facts

In the process of respecting and learning from role models, we need to recognize the true face of things, but also to learn and

deepen experience in life, to achieve self-sublimation in social practice, and strive to achieve breakthrough and transcendence. Imitation must not be divorced from reality, but should be consistent with reality. Kant pointed out that education should not only require children to blindly imitate, but should reflect the innocence of children and reflect the wisdom that children should embody. If a child has a lot of moral proverbs, and his behavior is completely different from that of his peers, he will imitate all the time, which is by no means the essence of children, too artificial. How can we avoid vanity in our children? Kant made it clear that role models can have an infinite effect, either in reinforcing or potentially eliminating useful teachings. Therefore, only teachings that are true to the facts of the example themselves, and that are in keeping with the nature of human nature, are good. [15] It can be seen that the education of example is not only to achieve the educational effect, if the blind pursuit of perfection, sublimity, nobility and perfection if not in line with the real situation that people know, there is a big contrast, the example set will cause people to question, criticism, disgust, and even become the object of ridicule.

## 5. Epilogue

In a word, in the process of implementing moral education under the current background, we should draw the essence from Kant's moral education thought, give full play to the role of example, oppose the influence of emotion or example, but actively advocate shaping the ability to act according to the standard through the level of thinking mode. At the same time, in the process of guided by good guidance, educators should be promoted to rationally view and think about the possible internal basis of moral example. The role of example mentioned by Kant is still very important today. Role models, whether pure or empirical, influence the individual. In moral education, the role of example runs through the whole, its value is more original than the normative value, is the most basic spirit, has a continuous inspiration to the reality.

## Author Contributions

Ying Zhao is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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