

The study of Cassirer's Humanistic Thought in *An Essay on Man*

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Abstract: For the study of Humanistic theory, there are many outstanding philosophers have elaborated, have their own unique insights, but the most prestigious from the German philosopher Cassirer, who answered the question of "what is man" in his book *An essay on man*, he creatively put forward the "man is a symbolic animal". He creatively proposed that "man is a symbolic animal". This is a great breakthrough in the theory of Western anthropology, which has also led to the further development of anthropological theory. This paper focuses on the development of Cassirer's theory of humanology and the far-reaching impact of humanology and theory on society. The essence of man lies in the fact that man is the journey of using symbols as a bridge of communication between man and culture and gradually emancipating man's mind. This paper specifies Cassirer's humanistic theory of man, symbol, and culture as one and evaluates his thought.

Keywords: Human; Symbol; Culture; Cassirer.

1. Introduction

The most important and opening question of the origins of Western humanistic theory is Cassirer's idea of human theory in his book *An essay on man*, the study of which was his starting point. "It seems to be widely acknowledged that the ultimate aim of philosophical investigation is self-awareness." (Kaufmann & Cassirer, 1947) Moreover, Cassirer is also the founder of cultural philosophy, and his theory of humanology also contains the association of man, symbol and culture, and his philosophy of symbolization is also a kind of cultural philosophical paradigm. Man is an animal of symbols, symbols serve as a bridge of communication between man and culture, while culture allows man to recognize himself and liberates his ideology. Cassirer's humanistic thought has given the western humanistic theory innovation and breakthrough, and driven the development of humanistic theory, which has far-reaching practical significance, but we should also treat Cassirer's humanistic thought dialectically, and treat the problem dialectically with subject and object.

2. The Generation of Cassirer's Humanistic Theory

For the generation of Western humanistic thought, Cassirer was adept at the study of the development of human nature and on the symbolic realms of myth, religion, language, art, history, and science. Cassirer compared the views of Plato and Aristotle. Unlike Plato, who placed too much emphasis on rational epistemology, Socrates paid more attention to the role of sensibility, and believed that philosophy is dialogical, through dialogues, constantly leading people to discover their inner rational answers and thoughts. The following is a discussion of the theoretical origins and generative background of Cassirer's humanistic thought.

It is in ancient Greece there are two quotes about human beings that have been handed down to this day, Protegra's "man is the measure of all things", Socrates' "know thyself", from ancient times to the present day on the question of human beings has always been the most fundamental

philosophical issues, but also the most worthy of people to think about It is also the most worthy of people's deep thinking and research, and people's exploration of the self is never-ending. As a neo-Kantian who studied at the Marburg School, Cassirer was deeply influenced by Kant's statement on categories. He believed that the innate categories of human beings are embodied in the symbols of culture, such as language, behaviour, science, etc., but he thought that the categories are also in constant motion, just like time and space. Cassirer constructed a cultural philosophy system with symbolic philosophy as the core, which is systematically expounded in his book *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Similarly, the theoretical origin of Cassirer's humanistic thought also comes from German humanist thought, in which Cassirer's thought is also very broadly absorbed by German humanist thought, including Humboldt's philosophy of language, Goethe's literary theory, etc., and in this way, he started to transform the study of human beings into the study of symbolic sciences. The study of human beings was transformed into the study of symbolic science.

Cassirer was in a time that was economically and politically in turmoil, so it is said that his anthropological thought was also extremely rich in modernized meaning, and the book, *An essay on man* which he wrote after the start of World War II, he also gave it more significance for the times. "Man's richness, subtlety, variety, and multifaceted nature are what define him as a human being." (Kaufmann & Cassirer, 1947)

First of all, economically, with the continuous development of commodity economy under the capitalist society in the mid-20th century, the relationship between human beings is mostly manifested as the relationship between things, and human beings are gradually objectified by commodities, and become the "commodities" of production, and Cassirer was deeply concerned with the social turmoil and anxiety at that time, and he hoped that people could know themselves and restore the subjective consciousness of human beings. He hoped that people could know themselves and recover the consciousness of human subjects, so he focused on the question of "what is man" in his book *An essay on man*, which could also awaken people's thoughts and liberate their

consciousness of objectification. Secondly, politically, the political situation was critical in the mid-twentieth century, and Cassirer became the rector of the University of Hamburg, but after Hitler came to power, Jews were forbidden to hold any positions. After the outbreak of World War II, Cassirer went to the United States, he witnessed the extinction of human nature in the war, he also used his life's work to cast his own humanistic theory, he through constant observation and conception, based on the human being itself, created a symbolic philosophy of culture, human beings through the symbols themselves, created a variety of cultures such as language, science, religion, and so on, composed of Secondly, politically, the political situation was critical in the mid-twentieth century, and Cassirer became the rector of the University of Hamburg, but after Hitler came to power, Jews were forbidden to hold any positions. After the outbreak of World War II, Cassirer went to the United States, he witnessed the extinction of human nature in the war, he also used his life's work to cast his own anthropological theory, he through constant observation and conception, based on the human being itself, created a symbolic philosophy of culture, human beings through the symbols themselves, created a variety of cultures such as language, science, religion, and so on, composed of "the world of symbols".

3. Connotation of Cassirer's Humanistic Thought

Cassirer's unique perspective to emphasize humanistic thought from the perspective of human, symbols, and culture has allowed us to move from ambiguity about anthroposophy to some trivial insights, and the whole development has also had a great deal of positive significance for our learning, so there is a need to explore Cassirer's humanistic thought in a more comprehensive way.

Symbols: a bridge for communication between people and culture. The central idea of Cassirer's humanistic concept is the symbol; the forms of culture created by man in his labor are derived from symbols, and symbols build bridges for communication between man and culture. Cassirer once said, "Owing to their universality, validity, and broad applicability, the principles of the symbolic system become the key to unlocking the specific human world—the world of human culture!"(Kaufmann & Cassirer, 1947) Man finds his human self in the symbolic world and gradually explores the path of cultural innovation belonging to man. Man shapes man's own cultural values by creating symbols, yet these symbols also belong to cultural forms, and they forge the symbolic world. Cassirer believed that the significance of the existence of symbols is to help people create culture and construct their own history. In answering the question of "what is a human being", he creatively put forward the "philosophy of human beings - philosophy of symbolization - philosophy of culture", which puts human beings on the path of cultural innovation. In answering the question of "what is man", he creatively put forward the "philosophy of man - the philosophy of symbolization - the philosophy of culture", which defines man as a symbol, which is a breakthrough, and gives meaning to the times, and enables people to create symbols and use symbols. In the world of culture, when people have symbols, they have the ability to create culture. Symbols are like the fuse between people and culture; without symbols, people may not be able to create the world of culture.

Culture: the process of liberating the human mind. In his

An essay on man, Cassirer demonstrates the oneness of man and culture, and that man's role can only be revealed in the world of culture. Of course, it is only in the process of creating culture that the human being can realize his or her essence, and it is also in the form of culture that he or she can acquire human freedom. In fact, human beings are the "masters" of culture, but also in the world of culture, human beings have been liberated and sublimated in their thinking, which all comes from the work of the symbol system. We can also recognize the original human being through the way of recognizing culture. In Cassirer's humanistic thought, the world in which people are now living is actually the world of culture, and if we want to study the essence of human beings, we also need to study the forms of culture. Cassirer studied six forms of culture in *An essay on man*, including myth and religion, language, art, history, and science, and he hoped that people could create culture and also obtain freedom at the same time.

Cassirer further states, "The form and architectural structure of human culture, rather than the mass of its constituents, give it its unique character and moral and rational values." (Kaufmann & Cassirer, 1947) It is only in the construction of culture that man can become a human being in the true sense of the word, that his subjective agency, as well as the openness of his mind under the ideology, can be manifested, and that he is slowly emancipating his mind and consciousness.

4. Evaluation of Cassirer's humanistic thought

First of all, in the study of anthropological theory, he ingeniously proposed that man is a symbolic animal, redefined the question of "what is man", and made a breakthrough progress in his thought, which is also a perfecting of Marxist philosophical theory. Cassirer emphasized that human beings have the ability to create symbols and produce culture through concrete labor, which is also shown in Marx's system of thought, and Marx emphasized that the difference between human beings and animals also lies in the role of human beings with the ability to create consciousness.

Secondly, it promotes Cassirer's construction of the philosophy of culture. Importantly, Cassirer's theory of symbolic philosophy has gradually transformed the critique of rationality into the critique of culture, and added the idea of humanism. Finally, from the symbolic point of view, Cahill made people realize the nature of the self, and while creating culture, he also broadened the field of practice, and in the symbolic world of science, language, and art, people were able to recognize the nature of the self. In Cassirer's anthropological thought, human beings play a dominant role, and symbols are the medium through which human beings create culture, and finally construct their own cultural philosophy.

Finally, Cassirer's humanistic thought along with the development of the historical era, there are some corresponding disadvantages, the most important of which is that Cassirer's humanology has a certain sense of idealism, exaggerating the subjective will of the human being, in the symbolic system, people create the cultural world through the work of the symbols, which is still embodied in the symbolic system of the philosophy of idealism. Secondly, Cassirer lacks a strong theoretical basis, compared to Marxist

philosophy, there is a lack of adequate explanation. Cassirer has been in his own symbolic world, although with theoretical breakthroughs, but also accompanied by ideological limitations. Whereas in Marxist philosophy, man is a concrete human being, without fixing him as a certain symbol, Cassirer's humanistic thought overly absolutizes man.

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