

## Modern ethics: Kant and Rousseau

He Huaihong

Dushu (Reading), No.12, 2004

Abstract: Since Kant passed away two hundred years ago, the world has changed drastically. In the calm of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were already signs of the trouble ahead for Europe, and the whole world was practically turned upside down in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Kant's moral philosophy has apparently withstood the test of time and maintains a strong influence on academic schools of thought. It is noteworthy that Kant himself, at one point in his life, was influenced by Rousseau.

However, what was Rousseau's actual influence on Kant? How are the philosophies of these two heavyweights, who have to a large extent affected our moral thoughts and actions, different? This influence, as Kant admits, first shifted the focus of Kantian thought from knowledge of nature and the universe to man. Prior to this, it was a question of knowledge that caused Kant to despise ordinary people. Contrary to Kant, Rousseau's provocations and challenges involved fundamental questions, representing an extremely important influence on the development of Kantian thought and changing its course.

According to the author, as far as the fundamental elements of Kantian theory are concerned, Kant's moral philosophy cannot be ignored, and as long as we live in a modern society, it will never be obsolete. Nowadays, the most potentially valid and efficient theory incorporates elements of both Kant and Rousseau. Whether one considers modern times as the highest or lowest point in the history of humanity, the moral path that they suggest is very narrow. However, if we are cautious and aware enough it is possible to successfully navigate this difficult path.

[End]

He Huaihong, Dushu (Reading), No.12, 2004



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/fr/deed.fr>