

Toward a Phenomenology of Moral Drive: A Dialogue with Dasan and Fichte

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Abstract

It is the aim of this paper to sketch the basic idea of the phenomenology of moral drive through a dialogue with Dasan and Fichte. In section 1, I will delineate Fichte's theory of moral drive; in section 2, I will discuss Chong Yak-Yong's theory of moral drive. In section 3, I will evaluate the theories of moral drive they have developed, and in section 4, I will sketch the basic idea of a phenomenology of moral drive.

Both Chong Yak-Yong and Johann Gottlieb Fichte were born in 1762. The year 2012 was their 250th anniversary. Chong Yak-Yong, better known under the name of Dasan, was the most important representative of *silhak*, a practical school of Confucianism in the 18th and 19th centuries of the Choson Dynasty in Korea. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, one of the fathers of German idealism, is famous for his *Wissenschaftslehre*, or Science of Knowledge. Now, apart from being contemporaries, they also developed similar theories in moral philosophy, namely, theories of moral drive.

This paper aims to define the basic idea of the phenomenology of moral drive through a dialogue with Dasan and Fichte. First, I will successively delineate and discuss their theories of moral drive. Then I will evaluate the theories they have developed before sketching the basic idea of the phenomenology of moral drive.

Fichte's theory of moral drive

Fichte develops his theory of moral drive in *Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (*The System of Ethics according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, 1798). Moral drive is one of the central concepts of his ethics. He makes a distinction among three different kinds of drives (*Triebe*), namely, natural drive, pure drive, and moral drive. In order to clarify the concept of moral drive, he first addresses the concepts of natural drive and pure drive.

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Natural drive has its origin in the human being as a natural entity. Humans have natural drive because they are natural entities. That drive reveals itself in the human being as a “formative drive” – *Bildungstrieb* – (Fichte, 2005: 116) and as “the drive for self-preservation” (Fichte, 2005: 117). With respect to these two aspects, it should be noted that, like the whole of nature that surrounds us, each human being is “a real organic whole” (Fichte, 2005: 114). As such, humans have to develop and re-develop themselves, forming and re-shaping themselves in order to achieve self-preservation. Hence these two drives turn out to be twin aspects of the natural drive.

Humans have the ability to reflect and, for this reason, the special feature of their natural drive is that it can become an “object of reflection” (Fichte, 2005: 119). Reflection here does not mean a theoretical reflection carried out by a methodological consciousness, but a pre-theoretical reflection. Thus, natural drive in humans is different from the natural drive of a plant, since the latter does not have the ability to reflect and its natural drive cannot be thought about.

In humans, the reflection that is directed to natural drive enables new types of consciousness to come into being. The most primitive initial reflection on natural drive makes it possible for “a longing [*ein Sehnen*]” (Fichte, 2005: 118) to occur in the field of consciousness. In this context, a “longing for” means an unclear feeling, “the feeling of a need with which one is not oneself acquainted” (Fichte, 2005: 119). The initial reflection on natural drive is the genetic origin of the *Sehnen*, and conversely, the *Sehnen* is the genetic product of the initial reflection on natural drive.

Now a second reflection can follow this initial reflection. The second reflection on natural drive makes it possible for “a desire [*ein Begehren*]” to enter the field of consciousness. In this context, “desire” refers to a distinct consciousness as opposed to longing, an unclear feeling. In contrast to longing, desire has its object, and in this regard we can speak, after Kant, of “the lower powers of desire” (Fichte, 2005: 125). Desire is therefore the product of the second reflection on natural drive.

What then is pure drive? This is the force that is opposed to natural drive. In order to understand what pure drive is, we need to take the reflections on natural drive discussed above into consideration. As previously mentioned, there are two kinds of reflection on natural drive, namely, the first reflection as the genetic origin of desire as an unconscious feeling, and the second one as the genetic origin of the desire that is equipped with a distinct consciousness of the object. As an unconscious reflection, the first reflection is blind and not free, whereas the second one is its opposite and for this reason can be called “a free reflection” (Fichte, 2005: 121). Why? Because its genetic product, desire, has a “distinct consciousness” provided both with the power to make a distinction between right and wrong and with the tendency to make a free decision to act in a certain situation. This is the reason why Fichte maintains that freedom already manifests itself in desire.

What is then the power to make a distinction between right and wrong and the tendency to make a free decision, features that could already be observed in desire? It is precisely a new force that resists (Fichte, 2005: 134) the one of natural drive and makes it possible for us to make a free decision. This new resistive force is the very origin of freedom. Hence it can be called “a drive for freedom, simply for freedom’s sake” (Fichte, 2005: 132). Fichte calls it “the pure drive” (Fichte, 2005: 135 ff.).

Now let us turn to moral, or ethical drive. This is the force that drives us as moral agents to do moral actions and to refrain from doing immoral ones. There are many types of ethical drive, such as “the drives of sympathy, pity, and philanthropic” (Fichte, 2005: 147). Fichte regards the ethical drive as a “mixed drive” (Fichte, 2005: 144) composed of natural drive and pure drive. As such, it has some affinity with these two other drives. Ethical drive owes its form to pure drive. For this reason, like pure drive, it is absolute in character, and orders the I to act absolutely without considering anything except itself. But unlike pure drive, it is related to natural things as the objects of natural drive. It is doing its work within nature as the totality of natural things. Nature as the totality

of natural things is the field where moral drive is displayed. In this sense, it is different from the pure drive that, having nothing to do with nature, is incessantly acting within the purely intelligible world as a world of purely intelligible beings. As long as moral drive is acting within nature, it has an affinity with the natural drive that has nature as its object. Needless to say, there is a difference between moral drive and natural drive, since, unlike natural drive, the moral drive does not have nature as its object.

What is the object of moral drive? It is free action as moral action, since it is the force that drives us to do free actions. “The ethical drive demands freedom – for the sake of freedom” (Fichte, 2005: 145). As long as this is the case, there is no difference between ethical drive and pure drive which, as already indicated, is also defined as “a drive for freedom, simply for freedom’s sake”. However, ethical drive is also different from pure drive, since the latter is always in possession of a perfect ideal freedom displayed within the intelligible world, and therefore does not need to call for freedom. The call for freedom for freedom’s sake is the distinctive character of moral drive.

Moral drive calls for free action as a “duty [*Pflicht*]” (Fichte, 2005: 148) that we, as moral beings, have to fulfil. Here duty means the duty to follow the categorical imperative discussed in Kant’s moral philosophy. Hence ethical drive is the very origin of the categorical imperative that could not exist without it; it urges us to form the categorical imperative – a concept, not a drive (Fichte, 2005: 147) – “for ourselves” (Fichte, 2005: 147) as it is constituted by us as moral beings equipped with an ethical drive.

Moral drive as the genetic origin of the categorical imperative is anything but a “sheer, blind drive” (Fichte, 2005: 146) as it drives us to think carefully and clearly about what free action is. It thus differs from natural drive, unable to carefully consider whether it is properly directed to its object.

Every drive is related to its own feeling, and in this respect, ethical drive is no exception. “The ethical drive makes itself known as respect; and obeying or not obeying this drive provokes approval or disapproval, a feeling of contentment with oneself or a feeling of the most painful contempt for oneself” (Fichte, 2005: 145).

Dasan’s theory of moral drive

In contrast to Fichte, Chong Yak-Yong did not write any book dealing with the issue of moral drive in detail. His theory of moral drive is scattered throughout his various works. Hence, one should not expect that he might have developed a systematic theory of moral drive as Fichte did. He does not even use the concept which does not imply that he overlooks it. In fact, he addresses the issue of “kiho” (嗜好), one meaning of which is, as will be clarified below, nothing other than moral drive.

According to Chung So-Yi (2010), Dasan first developed his theory of human nature as kiho in the middle period (1801–1818) of the development of his philosophy. In the middle period, he claims that only moral kiho pertains to human nature. However, in a later period (1819–1836), he will change his position and claim that the human being has two kinds of kiho, namely, “the kiho of the material body” and “the kiho of spiritual knowledge”. He writes in the Self-Inscribed Epitaph:

Nature is kiho. There is a kiho of the material body, as well as of spiritual knowledge, and they are equally called ‘nature’ (Chung, 2010: 54).

Needless to say, the “kiho of the material body” is the sensual kiho and the “kiho of spiritual knowledge” is the moral kiho.

What, then, is moral kiho? In order to understand it, we must first clarify what the notion of kiho originally means. I will accordingly analyse a passage from a text dealing with the structure of the mind (Chong, 1999: 156–192), in which Dasan draws a distinction between two categories of kiho – a distinction that is different from the one discussed above between the kiho of the body and moral kiho. This new distinction belongs to each of the two kinds of kiho; in other words, each category is of two different kinds. Dasan writes:

There are two sorts of kiho. The one is the pleasure in front of our eyes (目下之耽), as in the cases when we say that the peasant likes the mountain, the deer likes the field, the orang-utan likes wine. That is one meaning of kiho. The other meaning of kiho is being inevitable (畢竟之生成), as in the cases when we say that rice likes water, millet likes dry earth... (Chong, 1999: 158).

In order to grasp the distinction between these two kinds of kiho in this passage, one should note that kiho as liking has two different meanings corresponding to the difference between the subjects of kiho. Normally the subject of kiho is a sentient being such as a human or an animal, and we say that a sentient being likes something, as is the case with the first examples in the citation, mentioning the peasant, the deer, and the orang-utan. In these cases, “liking” means “having a feeling of pleasure with regard to something”. For example, “the peasant likes the mountain” means “the peasant has a feeling of pleasure in the mountain”; likewise, the deer has a feeling of pleasure in the field. Thus, the first meaning of kiho turns out to be the feeling of pleasure, or as Dasan puts it, “the pleasure that appears evidently to our eyes” (Chong, 1999: 158).

With respect to the second meaning of kiho, sentient beings are not the sole possible subjects of kiho. A non-sentient being such as a plant or a tree can also be considered as the subject of kiho. For example, we can say that rice likes water or millet likes dry earth... In this case, neither the rice nor the millet seem to have a feeling of pleasure. It is assumed that such non-sentient beings do not experience feelings, whether of pleasure or displeasure. Thus kiho as “liking” in the case of non-sentient beings refers to something else.

What, then, does kiho – “liking” – in the case of non-sentient beings mean concretely? Here, it means precisely “being inevitable”, as Dasan says in the excerpt cited above. For example, “Rice likes water” means that it is inevitable for rice to like water, or for the millet to like dry earth. What does it mean that it is inevitable that a living entity likes something? It means that it is driven by an inevitable force. What is the inevitable force that drives an entity to like something? It is nothing other than drive. Thus, the second meaning of kiho turns out to be drive as the inevitable force that drives a living entity to like something.

Now kiho as drive is not something that only a non-sentient being possesses, but sentient beings as well. Yet, in contrast to a non-sentient being, a sentient being has two kinds of kiho, namely, kiho as the feeling of pleasure and kiho as drive. How do these two kinds of kiho belong together in the sentient being? And which of them is more original from a genetic-phenomenological perspective? Kiho as drive is more original than kiho as the feeling of pleasure as it is the very condition of the possibility for the genesis of kiho as the feeling of pleasure. In a subject, kiho as drive must first be functioning, then, if it is fulfilled by the object toward which it is directed, the subject can experience the feeling of pleasure. This would be the case, for instance, with the peasant in Chong’s example. Thus, genetic-phenomenologically speaking, kiho as drive turns out to be the genetic origin of kiho as a feeling of pleasure. This kiho cannot exist without kiho as drive. It is the genetic product of the latter.

We are now in a position to understand what moral kiho means concretely. Moral kiho as moral feeling is the pleasure that we, as moral agents, can experience with respect to our own moral doing or that of others. We are pleased if we have done something morally good, and we feel bitter if we

have done something morally bad (Chong, 1999: 158). Moral kiho as moral drive is the inevitable force that makes us choose the morally good. Dasan claims that the Heaven imparts the moral drive to each human being at the moment of birth and drives us “to refrain from doing the morally bad and to do the morally good” (Chong, 1999: 158). He compares moral drive as human nature to “the nature of water that likes to flow down” or “the nature of fire that likes to move up to the sky” (Chong, 1995: 77).

How do these two aspects of moral kiho (moral drive and feeling of pleasure) belong together? The moral drive is the genetic origin of the feeling of pleasure. It could be compared to a fountain from which kiho as moral feeling issues. Human beings can experience a feeling of moral pleasure if they experience that their moral drive is fulfilled. In this case, the human being is acting in accordance with the call of moral drive and is satisfied with her/his moral act. The feeling of satisfaction is precisely the feeling of moral pleasure. Of course, we can also experience the feeling of moral pain if our moral drive is not fulfilled.

Moreover, the moral drive is the foundation for “accumulating the morally good” and “accumulating righteousness” (Chong, 1999: 158). In this context, it should be noted that the moral drive does not disappear after its first occurrence in the human being: it keeps occurring over and over again. In this respect, the moral drive is not different from most of the other kinds of drive, such as the sexual drive or the drive for nourishment. The fact that it repeatedly appears is the basic characteristic that moral drive has in common with most of the other kinds of drive. Such repetition motivates human beings to do the morally good repeatedly, and leads them to accumulate the morally good as well as righteousness. As such, it is the genetic origin of “the vast spirit” (浩然之氣) (Chong, 1999: 158–159) as the ideal mental state of the human being in Confucian philosophy.

Evaluation of the theories of moral drive developed by Dasan and Fichte

Although Dasan and Fichte were born in the same year (1762), they did not know each other. It is exciting to see that they developed their theories of moral drive independently from each other. What is even more exciting is the fact that there are fundamental similarities between the theories of moral drive they developed.

Dasan and Fichte both consider the concept of moral drive to be the central concept of ethics. Actually, from the genetic-phenomenological perspective, moral drive is the origin of all the other moral phenomena, such as moral feeling, conscience, freedom, moral will, practical reason, moral perception, moral imagination, moral judgment, moral reasoning, etc. In order to understand all the other moral phenomena from their roots, it is necessary to clarify the concept of moral drive.

Dasan’s and Fichte’s theories of moral drive are of great significance for contemporary discussions of moral philosophy; they could shed new light on various issues in this field. The treatment of moral drive in Fichte could provide a fresh approach on the issue of the Kantian categorical imperative, since the latter turns out to be the work of the moral drive, which is not dealt with in Kant’s ethics. In the same way, the treatment of moral drive in Dasan could shed new light on the issue of the moral feeling of pleasure, which turns out to be the work of the moral drive as well.

However, it is also clear that the theories of moral drive developed by Dasan and Fichte might present some difficulties for contemporary discussions on moral philosophy. One of the reasons for this is that in developing their own theories of moral drive, they resorted to some theological or metaphysical presuppositions that cannot be accepted in the contemporary discussion. For example, building his theory of moral kiho as moral drive, Dasan speaks of Heaven as the subject who imparts the moral drive to each human being at her/his birth (Chong, 1999: 158). Here he is using the metaphysical premise of Confucianism as an argument for his position. In a similar manner,

dealing with the issue of marriage, Fichte seems to rely on the premise of Christian theology (Fichte, 2005: 313), even though, as a philosopher, he is very careful not to accept it as an evident fact. This is one of the negative aspects of these theories of moral drive.¹

Of course, there are some differences between the theories of moral drive developed by Dasan and Fichte. First of all, they do not choose the same methods to develop their theories. Fichte adopts the method of abstraction as the transcendental method, whereas Dasan makes use of various methods such as the method of interpreting the mental state of another person, the method of linguistic analysis, and the method of textual criticism. Moreover, with respect to the issue of the morally good as the object of moral drive, it is not clear whether they share the same views. Fichte considers free action to be the morally good, whereas Dasan considers the four cardinal virtues of Confucianism – benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom – to be the morally good.

Partly appropriating the positive aspects, partly criticizing the negative ones, and partly promoting a dialogue between Dasan and Fichte, we could develop the phenomenology of moral drive as a rigorous science. In the next section, I will delineate the basic idea of such phenomenology of moral drive.

The basic idea of a phenomenology of moral drive

I will first clarify the significance that the phenomenology of moral drive has in the history of ethics. In this context, I would like to point out the following.

- 1) Fichte's theory of moral drive is a continuation and, at the same time, a criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. On the one hand, he accepts and takes up the main ideas of Kant's moral philosophy, such as the categorical imperative, freedom, duty, etc. On the other hand, he believes that Kant's moral philosophy is not radical and concrete enough, since it does not deal with the issue of moral drive as the genetic origin of freedom and the categorical imperative. To that extent, Fichte's own theory conceived of as a concrete ethics stands dramatically apart from Kant's moral philosophy. The phenomenology of moral drive that could be developed through a philosophical dialogue with Fichte could also be conceived as a continuation and at the same time as a criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. It is understood as a concrete ethics.
- 2) A concrete ethics is the idea that guided the conception of the various kinds of phenomenological ethics developed by Husserl (1988; 2004), Scheler (1996), and Levinas (1971). Thus, Max Scheler (1966) calls his phenomenological ethics a "material" ethics of value in contrast to Kant's ethics as a formal ethics. The phenomenology of moral drive accordingly amounts to a continuation of the tradition of phenomenological ethics. It has in common with the various kinds of the phenomenological ethics developed in the past that it uses the method of phenomenological reduction. However, it also takes a critical stance toward these past forms of phenomenological ethics insofar as the latter did not take due account of moral drive. In this way, the phenomenology of moral drive attempts to become a concrete ethics in a genuine sense.
- 3) The phenomenology of moral drive must be understood as a continuation and criticism of Dasan's theory of moral drive and the tradition of Confucian philosophy. Here I would like to emphasize the significance of the fact that the phenomenology of moral drive follows in the wake of the work relying on the Asian tradition of moral philosophy. In this respect, it should be noted that unfortunately this tradition does not yet play an important role in the contemporary debate of moral philosophy, even though it is rich in valuable insights.

Let us delineate now some basic features of the phenomenology of moral drive.

- 1) The phenomenology of moral drive aims to investigate the moral drive as intentionality. Many parts of the theories of moral drive developed by Dasan and Fichte focus on the intentional aspects of the moral drive. Needless to say, some parts of their theories cannot form a constitutive component of the phenomenology of moral drive, since they go beyond the scope of the latter. Here a typical example might be those components that belong to the Confucian or the Christian theology or metaphysics mentioned above.
- 2) The phenomenology of moral drive is not confined to the clarification of the moral drive. It has to clarify all the other kinds of moral intentionality – such as moral feeling, conscience, freedom, moral will, practical reason, moral perception, moral imagination, moral judgment, moral reasoning, and so on – with respect to their relationship to moral drive. The reason for this is that the moral drive is the original form of moral intentionality. As already indicated above, the feeling of pleasure is the product of the moral drive, which, however, is also the case for all the other kinds of moral intentionality. There is in fact an investigation that attempts to clarify the relationship between moral drive and moral judgment (Ni, 2009).
- 3) The phenomenology of moral drive also has to deal with the relationship between the moral drive and the other kinds of drive, such as natural drive, the drive toward knowledge, and the aesthetic drive, as well as the various kinds of intentionality that are based on these drives. Indeed, one of the main tasks of the moral drive is to regulate morally the various modes of operation of all these drives. Actually, Dasan and Fichte already dealt with the issue of moral drive together with that of natural drive.
- 4) The phenomenology of moral drive also aims to clarify the object of moral intentionality. As is well known, phenomenology attempts to clarify the noetic-noematic structure of intentionality, and the phenomenology of moral drive is no exception in this respect. It has to explain the structure of the morally good as the object of moral drive, as well as the structure of all the other kinds of moral objects that correspond to the various kinds of moral intentionality. Finally, it has to clarify the structure of the moral world as the totality of moral objects with respect to the life-world as the universal horizon of all the different worlds.
- 5) It is distinguished from the other sciences that deal with the moral drive but do not focus on its intentional aspect. For example, it is distinct from biology, brain science, or moral psychology – sciences that address the moral drive from the perspective of the natural sciences and do not emphasize its intentional aspect (Haidt and Joseph 2004; Pinker 2008). This does not imply that the phenomenology of moral drive has nothing to do with the natural sciences of moral drive. On the contrary, the two disciplines ought to cooperate, since they are dealing with the same phenomenon from different perspectives.
- 6) In order to develop a phenomenology of moral drive that should be differentiated not only from theology or dogmatic metaphysics, but also from the natural sciences of moral drive, we have to use various phenomenological methods such as the phenomenological reduction or the phenomenological interpretation. I would like to emphasize the meaning of the phenomenological reduction, since this is precisely the means that enables us to reach the domain of the phenomenology of moral drive by isolating it from the domain of theology, dogmatic metaphysics, or natural sciences. It enables us to concentrate on the various kinds of moral phenomena and to develop the phenomenology of moral drive as a rigorous science.

As we see, the philosophical work launched two centuries ago still raises issues that remain to be explored.

Note

1. There are further difficulties that are not discussed in this paper.

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