

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON THE ESSENCE OF THINGS

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О сущности вещей

Abstract. In different relationships, the meanings of the essence of things show different emphases: the basis of the existence of individual things, the standard of different categories, and also the object reflected by intuitive phenomena. At present, there are some controversies about the connotation and extension of essence in academic circles, and these controversies are the result of scholars' different perspectives on problems. In order to accurately grasp the connotation of essence, the author explains the core meaning of essence, analyzing the meaning of essence from three dimensions: quality, attribute and category, and the relations among them.

Аннотация. Ар кандай реляциялык контексттеги нерселердин маңызынын семантикасына ар кандай басым жасалат. Бул жеке нерселердин бар болушунун негизи гана эмес, ошондой эле ар кандай категориялардын классификациясынын стандарты, ошол эле учурда интуитивдик кубулуштун объектиси болуп саналат. Азыркы учурда академиялык чөйрөлөрдө нерселердин маңызынын мазмунун жана кеңейтилишин аныктоо боюнча дагы эле кээ бир талаш-тартыштар бар. Маңыздын коннотациясын туура түшүнүү үчүн, бул макалада маңыз, касиет, түр сыяктуу үч өлчөм аркылуу нерсенин маңызынын семантикалык мааниси жана алардын ортосундагы байланыштарга талдоо жүргүзүлөт, Ошол эле учурда, нерсенин маңызынын өзөктүү маанисин түшүндүрүүгө аракет жасалат.

Аннотация. В разных реляционных контекстах семантика сущности вещей будет иметь разный акцент, которая не только основа существования отдельных вещей, но и стандарт классификации различных категорий, а также объект интуитивного отражения явлений. В настоящее время в академических кругах все еще ведутся споры по поводу определения коннотационного и расширенного значения сущности. Чтобы точно уловить коннотацию сущности, в этой статье анализируется семантика сущности и взаимосвязь по трем параметрам: сущность, атрибут и категория, и в то же время объясняется основное значение сущности.

Keywords: quality, attribute, classification, essence

Урунттуу сөздөр: сапат, атрибут, класс, маңыз

Ключевые слова: качество, атрибут, категория, сущность

A theoretical perspective is the starting point for scholars to look at things according to the characteristics of their own thinking system, which can limit scholars' views on things to a certain extent.

1. Concepts of Essence in Different Relational Categories

Among many viewpoints on the essence of things, quality, attribute and category are the three common bases used to explain the essence of things.

Essence belongs to the category of quality, and quality is the meta-concept that reveals essence. Quality is "the inherent definitive property that a thing becomes itself and is different from other things"^[1]. The inherent definitive property can be understood from three aspects. Firstly, its existence is determined by the special contradiction of things, which is a special system that determines the property of a thing that is different from other things, and that makes a thing have unlimited qualities. Secondly, quality is directly identical to the existence of things. Quality will not exist when things disappear; when

quality changes, things become something else. This view has been affirmed by Engels in his exposition on quality, in which he clarifies "What exists is not quality, but only things that have quality and infinite qualities"¹². Thirdly, quality can leave a strong sensory impression, that is to say, it can be directly understood through the sensory system. In view of the close relationship between quality and things, especially the unique value of quality in showing the existence of things, some scholars put forward some viewpoints, such as "essence exists in quality"³; "essence is a kind of quality"⁴; "essence is the fundamental quality, or the dominant quality"⁵. These viewpoints point out the connection between quality and essence when stipulating the property of things. The connection is equivalent to the relationship between "what" and "why". However, to some extent, quality, which is directly related to the existence of things, can be directly perceived by the sensory system, without complicated rational thinking to obtain cognition. Essence is the basis that determines "why it being itself". Essence is hidden behind a series of complex phenomena shown by things. It is the advanced cognition abstracted from primary cognitions such as quality, attribute and phenomenon. Essence cannot be perceived directly. It needs to be grasped by abstract thinking. Therefore, essence is an indirect existence. In particular situations, this indirect existence only shows there are some phenomenon in the material world that correspond to it.

Essence belongs to the category of attributes, which is the meta-concepts to reveal essence. Attribute refers to "the inherent characteristics or properties of things"⁶, which is determined by its own quality that coexists with things. In the real world, relationships between things are complicated, and the quality of the same thing shows different attributes in different contrast relationships. Compared with inherence of quality, the attribute of things is a phenomenal existence. Things can show many attributes that imply complex contrast relationships, which, to a certain extent, have the function of distinguishing things and determine the boundaries between things. According to the status of attributes in distinguishing features or properties of things, attributes can be divided into fundamental attributes and non-fundamental attributes. As a concept of classification, a fundamental attribute refers to "the attribute that has decisive influence"⁷. It is an inherent attribute that distinguishes a thing from other things. However, non-fundamental attributes do not have this characteristic. In distinguishing the features and properties of things, essence and fundamental attribute have great similarity in functions. Some scholars have discovered the special relationship between essence and fundamental attribute, and put forward that "under certain conditions, the essence of things is the collection of essential attributes of things"⁸. In other words, "the complex and unity of essential attributes"⁹ is the essence of things. Obviously, this view points out that the relationship between the essence of the general concept and the fundamental attributes of the sub-concepts can be simply summarized as a many-to-one relationship. It also expresses the characteristics that essence reflects the basic property of things in the relative relationship, which is the important reason why essence, or the set of fundamental attributes, can distinguish different things. Through the above analysis, it can be concluded that essence and fundamental attribute are not equivalent concepts. In most cases, essence is different from fundamental attribute because a thing may have multiple fundamental attributes, but there is only one essence which is stipulated by "the fundamental contradiction of things, and is relatively stable before the fundamental contradiction is solved"¹⁰. Only under ideal conditions or extreme conditions, the fundamental attribute of things is equivalent to essence, but this is only a hypothetical situation. It needs further examination on the idea that mixes essence and fundamental attributes as one concept.

Essence belongs to the category of species, and classification is the meta-concept to reveal nature. The term classification first appeared in Shang-Zhou Dynasty in ancient China. In the long evolution, classification has gradually been endowed with the meaning of logic, that is "classification is a collection of things with certain same attributes"¹¹. Obviously, the original concept of classification reveals the essence of things not from the strict logical category of species, but from the indispensability to find common elements between things in the process of recognizing similar things. In ancient Greece, Aristotle proposed "among several elements that make a definition, species is regarded as the most important to reveal the essence of the thing to be defined."¹². In Aristotle's view, species is the superior concept of genus, which is different from the modern species relationship. In modern logic, the genus is the superior concept of species, which is exactly the opposite to the relationship described by Aristotle. Therefore, from the perspective of modern logic, Aristotle's essence of things is actually the genus to which the same kind of things belong. Some scholars agree with Aristotle's theory of species relationship, and point out that "essence traditionally refers to the species or classification to which every member of species and classification must belong"¹³. Here, the essence of things is defined from two dimensions: species and classification, which are the concepts of same sequence, so they are the essence of things. In

fact, being the same level concepts in modern logic, both classification and genus are the essence of things, and they focus on the general classification of things according to certain similarities. However, as the essence of things, the indivisible sub-classification (species) focuses on expressing "accurate things"^[14], and it has distinguished individual characteristics. According to the above analysis, it can be concluded that it has a long history to use genus as a large category and the species as a sub-classification to reveal the essence of things.

2. Reexamine Essence

In different relationships, the concept essence overlaps with quality, attribute, and classification in various degrees, which causes some confusion to the understanding of essence. Therefore, the following points should be paid more attention to.

First of all, essence, quality, attribute and classification are all logical provisions when we understand things. The substance of these logical stipulation is that cognition corresponds to phenomena or things, but they are not independent objects or they exist physically. Just as Lenin says "law and essence are the same kind of concepts (the same sequence), or more precisely, the same degree of concepts that indicate people's deepening understanding of phenomena, the world and so on"^[15].

Secondly, in the process of defining things and distinguishing one thing from others, essence is not only closely related to quality, attribute and classification, but also shows significant differences, so for better understanding the connotations and denotations of these concepts, it is necessary or us to consider their different features. Compared with quality, attribute and classification, essence emphasizes the internal, stable and regular connection hidden behind a series of superficial phenomenon. Both the inner link of essence and the inherent connection of quality reflect the unique contradictory movements of things, and one of the differences between them lies in their attitude towards contradictions. The contradiction that determines the essence of things exists through the whole process of the development of things, and it is neither the contradiction of internal and external unity, nor the contradiction of primary and secondary relations. It refers to the internal fundamental contradiction that determines the nature of things. Being different from the fundamental contradiction of essence of things, the inherent contradiction of quality refers not only to internal contradiction, but to external contradiction, which is the organic unity of internal and external contradictions. Compared with attributes, in normal circumstances, essence belongs to attribute category, more precisely speaking, it is the collection of fundamental attributes, and is more abstract and accurate than fundamental attributes. However, as far as a complete process of understanding activity is concerned, understanding the attributes of things usually precedes understanding the essence of things. As far as the relationship between essence and classification is concerned, things of the same essence belong to the same large classification, which implies that these things have some common fundamental attributes. In this sense, essence is the most generalized and the most inductive concept. In addition, essence also refers to the basis of the existence of things. It is a standard to determine "how to judge a thing"^[16]. It is the basis that classifies individual things. Therefore, it is a special essence. In sum, people's understanding of the activities of things is similar and relative, from the perspectives of the quality, attribute and category of things. The essence of things also has this feature, and shows some distinctions due to the different relative relationships. The distinctions emphasize common points or particularity. However, regardless of the distinctions, these core points are often included in essence: essence is determined by the fundamental contradiction of things, reflects the relations among the internal elements of things, expresses the fundamental nature of things, and embodies the basis of the existence of things.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that, from philosophical perspective, the essence of things is a logical stipulation that reveals the internal connection of things. This logical stipulation reflects the objectivity of people's understanding of things or phenomena. As far as the connotation of essence is concerned, essence is related to quality, attribute and classification. By analyzing the similarities and differences of these relationships, the core of essence can be highlighted, so as to achieve an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the concept.

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Expert comments:

This paper comprehensively discusses the essence of things from three dimensions: quality, attribute and class, and puts forward the views properly. The author's vision is novel, and his viewpoint is accurate and objective. The article can be used as a reference for researchers in related fields.
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