Learning Journal 7

**Learning Journal: Reflection on Wang Yangming’s Philosophy**

This week’s study of Wang Yangming has profoundly influenced my perspective on morality, knowledge, and action. Before engaging with his ideas, I viewed morality as something shaped primarily by external teachings, laws, and cultural expectations. However, Wang’s philosophy of **innate moral knowledge (liangzhi, 良知)** and the **unity of knowledge and action (zhi xing he yi, 知行合一)** has challenged my previous assumptions and encouraged a deeper reflection on personal ethics. This journal entry explores the most interesting aspects of Wang’s thought, how it reshaped my understanding of knowledge and truth, and its broader implications for my life and culture.

### **Most Interesting Lesson: The Unity of Knowledge and Action**

The most compelling aspect of Wang Yangming’s philosophy is his belief that true knowledge is inseparable from action. Previously, I considered moral knowledge and ethical behavior as two distinct aspects of human development—one could know what is right but still fail to act accordingly. However, Wang argues that genuine understanding of morality is only achieved when it is put into practice. If someone claims to know kindness but does not act kindly, then, according to Wang, they do not truly understand kindness at all (Ming, 2021). This concept resonates with me deeply because it highlights the importance of integrity and personal responsibility in ethical decision-making.

### **Shifting Perspectives: Before and After Wang Yangming**

Before studying Wang Yangming, I believed that knowledge was something primarily acquired through study, books, and formal education. My understanding of morality was largely influenced by external sources—teachers, family, religious texts, and societal norms. While I valued experiential learning, I had not considered the extent to which morality could be an innate, intuitive aspect of human nature.

Wang’s philosophy challenged this view by emphasizing that morality is not something we passively receive but something we actively cultivate through self-reflection and practice (Ivanhoe, 2019). This shift in perspective has made me more aware of my own moral intuitions and how they manifest in daily interactions. Instead of viewing ethical knowledge as something separate from behavior, I now recognize that every decision I make reflects my true level of understanding.

### **Cultural Relevance and Personal Impact**

Wang Yangming’s ideas are particularly relevant to my cultural background. In many societies, morality is often framed as a set of rules imposed by authority figures—whether religious, governmental, or familial. His philosophy challenges this externalized approach and instead emphasizes self-awareness and individual moral responsibility. This shift is significant because it empowers people to take ownership of their ethical development rather than merely following prescribed norms.

On a personal level, I see Wang’s ideas shaping how I approach education, work, and relationships. In education, I now appreciate the importance of learning through direct experience rather than just theoretical study. In the workplace, ethical leadership requires more than just knowing what is right—it demands the courage to act on that knowledge (Xie, 2021). In relationships, practicing virtues like patience, honesty, and compassion is more meaningful than simply knowing about them in theory.

### **Conclusion**

Studying Wang Yangming has expanded my understanding of morality, knowledge, and truth. His idea that morality is innate and must be actively practiced has shifted my perspective from seeing knowledge as something external to something deeply personal and experiential. This new viewpoint encourages me to take greater responsibility for my ethical decisions and to integrate knowledge and action more seamlessly in my daily life. Wang’s philosophy is not just an abstract theory—it is a practical guide for living with integrity and awareness. Moving forward, I aim to cultivate my **liangzhi** and ensure that my knowledge and actions remain united.

### **References**

Ivanhoe, P. J. (2019). Three Streams: Confucian reflections on learning and the moral heart-mind. Oxford University Press.

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