

Life Education from Montaigne's Perspective on Death

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Abstract: *Michel de Montaigne was a humanist thinker in the 16th century Renaissance. At the same time, he was also the writer who is most passionate about the proposition of death in this period. In his Essays "Les essais de Michel de Montaigne", He took the study of himself as a starting point and then extended to all human beings, seeking the meaning of life from the research of death, and trying to dissolve the avoidance of death. This paper takes Montaigne's philosophy of death as a reference sample to explore the cognition of death concept applicable to life education.*

Keywords: Montaigne, Death, Life education.

1. Montaigne in the Context of the Renaissance

Montaigne survived most of the sixteenth century and was a witness to the history. This century was a restless one for France. Renaissance activity flourished at that time. Humanists opposed the feudal autocratic rule, they denounced the decay of the Catholic Church and hated the oppression of the people by the Church, which gradually disintegrated the original feudal church ideological system. In Montaigne's family, his father was a devout Catholic, his mother was a Jewish, and his sister was a Calvinist. Montaigne had received a very strict classical education since childhood, and there are many criticism and self-analysis based on the ancient thought. Montaigne said, "I was raised by the dead since I was young [1]." Under the dual influence of the prevailing humanism and the family environment, it has created Montaigne's free and inclusive character and style.

The unrest in France in the 16th century was also manifested in the Huguenot War, which lasted for more than thirty years, and which began from 1562 until 1598. Montaigne went through almost the whole process of war, and witnessed countless people die in war. At the age of his thirty, his most important friend—Raboesi, died. At the age of forty-five, he developed the incurable disease — kidney stone, which accompanied him for fifteen years until his death. At his fifty-two, the city in which he is located — Bordeaux, where the plague spread, and the corpses were strewn all over the field. These experiences, which are closely related to death, forced Montaigne to think about the issue of death head-on. In his famous book, *Les essais de Michel de Montaigne*, the theme of death occupies a great place, almost mentioned in every chapter. As he said, "I don't want to see these most important thinkers, divorced from the common concern of mankind — death, no matter how perfect they are, they are, after all, person of this earthly world." In his opinion, people is born step by step towards death, which no one can avoid. Therefore, if you want to study people, you must first study death positively [2].

2. Montaigne's Philosophy of Death

2.1 Face Up to Death

Montaigne suffered from kidney stones during his trip to Italy.

Montaigne was very clear: "Through the disease of the kidney system, the meaning of survival allows him to get closer to death, so it is also a victory. In fact, his kidney stone was a symbol of death, which always reminded him that his journey accompanied his death. This death is a depiction of the journey itself or a symbol of the inner vitality of his written account, that is, he is 'experiencing, and may soon be coming to an end [3]." "Life should be called life, or death should be called life, who knows?" Since you do not know, then there is no fear. So, will kidney stones still be the pain that plagues Montaigne? Montaigne's answer was firm and positive, he said, "Don't be afraid and don't look forward to your last days [4]" Montaigne did not worry about death, but learned a better life through death. In an essay entitled "On Practice" in the second volume of his book, he argues that people fear symbolic death far more than death itself. Montaigne said that there is no way to experience death, and he only had a so-called brush with death, but most people cannot have such moments, so there is no way for people to experience death. Today, science is constantly advancing, but we find that sometimes we can't solve those mental problems on our own, and even exacerbate those problems. But Montaigne, in his time, already had such a natural attitude.

Montaigne believes that all people are equal before death, death is accidental, "Because human affairs are unpredictable, the slightest change, it will become a completely different state [5]". No one can escape death, whether young or old. In the long-term development of western philosophy, different philosophers put forward various plans to overcome the fear of death: from the immortality of Plato's soul, to Stoa's "eager death obeys god to return to God", to the redemption of God in Christian philosophy, Montaigne also proposed his own way to overcome the fear of death. First, he analyzes the attitude of ordinary people towards death with fear, he said: "the average human practice is not to think about it (i.e. death) [6]". Montaigne thinks this approach is not desirable, death is the attribute of human beings, in Montaigne's view, do not to think about death or escape death, will only make your life full of pain, so this practice is "so vulgar blind how stupid [7]". So Montaigne went the opposite way, believing that the way to overcome the fear of death is to get used to death. Since death is accidental, death can come at any time, so we should regard death as a common thing of daily life, and treat death with a normal heart, "we often think of death in our head, and regard it as a very common thing". For Montaigne, being accustomed

to death achieved freedom. To overcome the fear of death is to recognize the essence of life, and we will better grasp life, rather than being enslaved by death all the time. Therefore, overcoming the fear of death is the only way to achieve freedom. "Those who learned to die, who will no longer have the enslaved mind, can ignore all bondage and coercion [8]". But it is not easy to do this, who can easily do "accustomed to death"! He said, "I have developed a habit of not only thinking about death in my heart, but also talking about it." This is the method that Montaigne himself used in the process of habitual death.

2.2 The Choice of Death

Montaigne believes that people have an absolute right to the choice of death, this right can not be affected by any one, people can not choose life, but "the exit of life (i. e., death) has thousands of [9]." Montaigne divided the human attitude towards death into two kinds: bravely face death and passively avoid death, he linked death with virtue, that only by facing death squarely is virtue, is commendable. Montaigne believed that the formation of virtue was based on pain and misfortune, which was also the only way for the formation of virtue. It is important to be clear here that Montaigne's death refers to the situation occurring when death is inevitable, and he refers to the attitude of the dying person facing death. What should be done when the individual is not a dying person? Montaigne said to love life and actively experience life, so in life, Montaigne will not oppose death. Although he has discussed a lot about death, the aim is to make people aware of the nature of death, when to face death and when to love life. Montaigne is clearly against suicide on a simple basis: the desire to end his life without the threat of death is against the tone of the Renaissance. "It is against nature; it is a special disease." The existence of human beings is the basis of all individual behaviors, while alive, you can not commit suicide.

2.3 Body and Soul

Montaigne believes that a healthy soul needs the support of the body. "The body is just a way, a state. But the mind is colorful, it governs the various sensations and consciousness of the body to obey mind [10]". The mind can guide the body, as long as the temperament maintains a calm state, the mind can clearly identify the pain, neither exaggerated, nor despise the pain. Montaigne believed that the body itself correctly perceives pain and pleasure, but because of the mind of all kinds of imagination, distort the intensity of the pain or happiness, so in this case, Montaigne think this is "the soul and body are detached", if the soul can dominate the body correctly, let it keep a smooth state, then there will not be a trouble or wrong view, will correct understanding of pain and misfortune. The individual is not afraid of death itself, the individual is afraid of the pain before death, the fear of the process of waiting for death. Because of the exaggeration of the mind, most people fear of death, so Montaigne believes that death does not belong to the past, nor belong to the present. So Montaigne states the importance of a strong mind in overcoming false views, Because "view is a powerful opponent, it has no scruples, no restraint [11]". Montaigne believes that the cultivation of the mind is crucial. Only by controlling the body and various desires through reason can the mind correctly understand the pain without having the

wrong view. One way to cultivate a great mind is philosophy, as said before, philosophy can practice how to treat death, also philosophy can cultivate a noble mind, "As long as the mind is filled with philosophy, it will be full of health [12]". Montaigne believes that death can also be learned through various experiences. He lists his own death experience to strengthen his argument. "We think of many wonderful ways to persuade others not to fear death and pain. Why doesn't each of us choose one of them according to our own temperament? [13]" Montaigne advocates individuals to try different ways to exercise according to their own situation, and at the same time can cultivate a great, strong mind, which can better adapt to different physical states, gradually forming a good cycle.

3. Life Education Under Positive Psychology

Montaigne's fearlessness does not mean that people are not afraid of death, in fact, this is very difficult, his real intention is to teach people how to learn to die, in the face of death, because of death, how to live. This is actually a relative problem. Death in the eyes of ordinary people is certainly a terrible thing, so most people repeatedly avoid it. People avoid it repeatedly, and they instinctively fear it more, When the danger of disaster strikes, people get carried away and are unable to make rational judgments. Montaigne's death education taught people that knowing death leads to freedom faster, and to consider death first is to consider freedom first. Whoever learns to die is learned not to be a slave. Knowing the truth of death can help us to get rid of all constraints and limitations. Those who know that losing their life is not a bad thing will certainly be honest about anything in life. Learning to die, to live well, this looks very strange, but in fact, it was originally the most simple, the most basic, the most natural thing. Montaigne's calm and open-minded attitude towards death coincides with the current life education which is guided by positive psychology.

3.1 Life Education

Life education teaches students to correctly understand the value of life, understand the meaning of life activities, and cultivate students caring feelings, humanistic spirit and the pursuit of ultimate belief, enhance the ability to adapt to the modern civilized life. Life education can guide students to learn to respect the law of life, explore the meaning of life, and promote the continuous improvement of individual life. However, people's understanding of life and the education of life should start from cultivating the ability to survive. The goal is to develop a spiritual, social life ability and to find meaning in life, and in the process to be clearly aware of the end, and create a vivid and diverse life trajectory without fear or anxiety and with only one destination. Montaigne declared that "the greatest thing in the world is for a man to understand what kind of person he is." The highest art of all art is self-preservation. We've lived enough for others, so let's live for ourselves, at least for the rest of our short lives [14]." He knew very well that it was a very difficult task to maintain his inner independence in himself, and he had to live his own life, not just let time pass and just live his life [15]. It can be said that the reason why Montaigne was able to leave a legacy in history with only one essay is that he held high the banner of self in the wave of the Renaissance and pushed the subjective

position of the self to the extreme like never before. All his life, he thinks about "how should I live", how can individuals break free from all kinds of servility, live happily, die where they want, and become themselves. To this end, he bravely retired from the rapids of officialdom and returned to the castle to practice his philosophy. Montaigne believed that the greatest and most glorious masterpiece of man is to live properly, which is the most fundamental and glorious cause. Be able to always put what you know into practice, and be able to stick to your inner freedom in any situation, and never give up on yourself, is what Montaigne requires of himself. Montaigne's philosophy of life can be praised as a model of life education in the 16th century, and at the same time leads later thinkers to pay attention to death. Many ideas are not out of date in the 21st century.

3.2 The Main Content of Positive Psychology

First, a positive emotional experience. Emotion is an individual's attitude experience to the outside world, which will produce a series of behavioral reactions. Positive emotional experience shows a positive attitude, mentality, and consciousness. The whole psychological tendency tends to be in a positive and full state. Positive emotional experiences can stimulate a positive behavioral tendency and a corresponding sense of happiness and satisfaction. Positive emotional experience is a kind of positive psychology issued by individuals from the inside out. Inner satisfaction and subjective upward emotional experience will produce a strong spiritual force, allowing individuals to have a stronger sense of satisfaction with the current life, treat the past peacefully, meet the present, and deal with the future optimistically [16]. Just as Montaigne mentioned the relationship between the soul and the body, actively try to exercise, a strong mind can cast a healthy body [17]. He demanded that as long as one constantly imagines the ubiquity of death, one will become accustomed to death over time. Montaigne believed that he had overcome the fear of death, "Thank God, I am mentally ready to leave at any time [18]".

Second, positive personality traits. Personality mainly refers to some characteristics and qualities of the individual in his life. Personality is closely related to individual cognition, emotion and behavior, which is the basic trait of relatively stable individuals. Positive personality traits mentioned in positive psychology mainly refer to the positive emotion that individuals can pursue happiness on their own and experience happiness in daily life. Positive personality can have a profound impact on the long-term development of an individual, which is manifested as excellent moral character such as wisdom, courage, benevolence, justice, and moderation. Individuals with positive personality are more likely to produce strong spiritual strength at the level of thought and behavior, fight against negative emotions, and make individuals become more optimistic, tenacious and happy. That is to say, Montaigne describes that each person has a different temperament, a distinct choice, a unique idea and a variety of positive personality traits, but undeniable positive personality can achieve more positive behavior, promote happiness, accept death, and enjoy life [19].

3.3 Life Education Under the Guidance of Positive Psychology

Life education is carried out from the perspective of positive psychology to help students to establish a positive psychology, promote students to recognize the rich connotation of life, and intervene in students' suicide, depression, violence and other phenomena, so that the implementation of life education is guaranteed. Lead the students to discover the value of life, recognize the meaning of life, and feel the happiness and development. Through positive psychology perspective to carry out life education, can effectively explore the point of life education and positive psychology, promote students to realize the value of identity, and with positive psychology strategy, let the students update life concept, can make life education theory research further enrich, let the student will personal value to social value level, have higher and stronger development consciousness, can enrich the theoretical basis of life education. At present, the development of students' life education is generally permeated through psychological classroom, which lacks a complete life education concept system and curriculum concept. The application of positive psychology to promote life education can further enrich the theoretical basis of life education research, promote the improvement of life education work step by step, enrich the knowledge of life education, make the courses clear and coherent, and promote the popularization and improvement of life teaching. In practice, we can strengthen the cooperation between home, school and society, and explore appropriate co-education mechanisms, such as cooperating with the medical system to develop a new type of "understanding death" curriculum, introducing positive experiential teaching, and trying to let students have near-death experiences. Under the guidance of positive psychology, we will work together to build a positive social atmosphere, a harmonious campus environment, and a warm family atmosphere, improve positive psychology implications, strengthen emotional intelligence education methods, and experience a better life.

4. Conclusion

Combining Montaigne's philosophy of death and life education under the guidance of positive psychology, we should face up to death and love life. Don't avoid death just because of the fear of death, and have a clear view of life and death without prejudice to death. Protect your life from both physical and mental aspects, although the length of life is difficult to master, but the thickness of life is determined by oneself. We only need to fully understand death and understand life, know how to enjoy the joy of life and feel life carefully, and the quality and content of life will be infinitely rich. People who live to death, more understand the preciousness of life, cherish life more, more will praise the beauty of life. Thinking about death with a positive psychology, in the face of death, can make the world beautiful and special shine once and once, and illuminate everyone's life.

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