

Source of Byung-Chul Han's Philosophy of Time Theory

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Abstract: *The concept of benign time is proposed by Byung-Chul Han in response to the diagnosis and criticism of time under the domination of digital capital, which is beneficial for human survival. It is based on Marx's view of time as the theoretical foundation of benign time. But this kind of fragrant and benign time does not come out of thin air. It is based on the previous interpretation of time and the diagnosis and criticism of real time. Marcel Proust's discourse on recalling time in his book *In Search of Lost Time*, Heidegger's interpretation of round-trip time, and Chinese incense's criticism and correction of the negative time in today's society dominated by digital capital provide different ideas and perspectives for his study of time philosophy.*

Keywords: Philosophy of Time, Benign time, Byung-Chul Han, *In Search of Lost Time*.

1. Marx: Free Time

In Marx's view, a person's lifetime is divided into labor time and free time. However, with the development of capitalist private ownership economy, free time continues to shorten and labor time continues to lengthen. Marx attributed the current development of workers and labor time to "alienated labor"; Marx positioned time in human practical activities, viewing humans as active beings in time, and time becoming the scale and development space of human life. Nowadays, with the development of digital neoliberalism, Byung-Chul Han's theory of time is based on Marx's theory of "alienated labor", recognizing that modern society has shifted from "exploitation by others" to "self exploitation". Labor and haste occupy all non rest time of human beings, forming a negative phenomenon that is not conducive to human development. Therefore, based on the adverse effects caused by this phenomenon, a criticism is launched and a benign time is proposed in the path based on human subjectivity, calling for the restoration of the weight of life in human life.

The ultimate goal of Marx's interpretation of time in *Capital* is to achieve human liberation, and the essence of achieving human liberation is to transcend the exploitation of time and realize the liberation of free time. Marx's emphasis on free time mainly aimed to achieve the comprehensive development of human freedom, so that humans have more time to engage in self-development. Byung-Chul Han closely followed Marx and considered the current situation of human survival from the perspective of the comprehensive development of human freedom. However, the current unfavorable time seriously threatens human survival freedom. So Byung-Chul Han took Marx's free time as the foundation of the theory of benign time, standing on the basis of restoring balance between human and time, and proposed a benign view of time that is in line with social development when criticizing the unhealthy time of modernity. He hoped that humans could have enough time to dwell in labor and contemplate the philosophy of life value. Benign time and Marx's free time have similarities. From a macro perspective, benign time is free time, while from a micro perspective, it is just a matter of different approaches. However, both aim to strive for human free time. Byung-Chul Han started from the camp of Marx's free time, and used his predecessor Marcel Proust's discourse

on recalling time in "Remembrance of Things Past", Heidegger's interpretation of round-trip time, and Chinese incense as the theoretical source of his theory of benign time, which is a profound foundation of benign time.

2. Proust: Recalling Time

Proust's time strategy for the era of haste is to help time return to sustainability and let it emit its fragrance again [1]. The successful publication of *In Search of Lost Time* fully presents Proust's theory of time to the public, and this work is also the pioneering work of modern stream of consciousness novels. The novel begins with a piece of Madeline cake, followed by the life of Marcel in Proust's works. It is a retrospective work that narrates Marcel's life and is divided into multiple volumes, each with different content, but it is a masterpiece that contains narrative memories of time.

Proust's exposition of the entire view of time was deeply influenced by Bergson's continuous time. Proust set up two parallel dimensions of time, external time and internal time, in *In Search of Lost Time* [2]. The so-called external time refers to all the changes that can be seen by the eyes, and the passage of time is in the changes of all things in the world. The natural passage of time, such as Meng Haoran's "White hair drives old age, green sun drives the end of the year," is beyond the control of the subject, who cannot recall or savor the passing time. Therefore, only by turning their attention to time into inner time can they truly feel the traces of life and survival. Once Proust turned time towards what Bergson called the continuity of consciousness itself, he gained immense freedom. Proust's perception of time was deeply influenced by Bergson, and reminiscence is an activity that takes place within the context of internal time. In reminiscing about the entire event of the past, time has a narrative nature, starting from the past and heading towards the future. From birth to death, from carriages to cars, everything is carried out in an orderly manner in time, using narrative techniques to rewrite fragmented lives. The aroma of Madeline cake made Marcel reconsider the death of life, and the entrance fragrance made Marcel reminisce about life. Death is not scary, what is important is that this life has a meaningful existence. The taste of petite madeleine in his mouth has brought him a kind of survival law that transcends life and death. At this moment, he

felt the meaning of existence beyond life and death, his mood was sublimated at this moment, and he regained a different perspective on life time. Proust's persistent strategy is to let time emit its fragrance [3]. In Proust's view, the era of haste stifles "contemplation", criticizes the "de temporalization" of time, and attempts to restore its continuity and fragrance, which is a form of free time. So the continuity of time in Proust is a continuous, fragrant crystal of time, and the inner time is a so-called spiritual time that starts from the heart, realizes life, and carries the entire past on its back, allowing it to constantly reminisce about the past. Physical time is the time when capitalism monopolizes the exploitation of laborers, the time that Proust used to criticize, the time that Byung-Chul Han referred to as the "filmmaking style", and the time of Proust's hurried era, which is a time without freedom.

As a predecessor of Byung-Chul Han, Proust's publication of *In Search of Lost Time* provided great enlightenment for Byung-Chul Han's diagnosis of benign time in contemporary times, not only as a source but also as the foundation of his time theory. Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is a critique and redemption of his hurried era, and this redemption of benign time (free time) is continued by Byung-Chul Han.

3. Heidegger: Round Trip Time

The publication of *Existence and Time* is a relay of time criticism to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, both of which are a diagnosis and criticism of the living environment at that time. As a senior junior who obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Freiburg by studying Heidegger's related papers, Byung-Chul Han has a unique perspective on Heidegger's time and has used some of his ideas as the foundation and groundwork for his own time philosophy research, providing a strong theoretical source and support for the publication of *Duft der Zeit*.

Heidegger conducted a comparative study on two situations of boredom, the first being 'we are bored by...' and the second being 'feeling bored while...'. In the situation where we are bored by something, time does not exist within us, and in this fixed environment, boredom comes from the outside rather than from within; The second scenario is exactly the opposite of the first scenario, where we feel bored in something, and the boredom in this scenario comes from within, from within. We have time, and no matter what happens, we will eventually return to this within ourselves. So Heidegger questioned and criticized the first situation, why don't we have time? It's not that we don't want to have time, it's that real life doesn't allow us to have our own time. This kind of lack of time is a more serious loss of one's own, even more so than giving up time to squander it [4]. In this boredom caused by something, the existence of time is not determined by it, but by the external environment. This being that cannot determine the existence of time should have control over time and its own thoughts. Regardless of the external environment, this being should not be influenced by it and should have the freedom to control time. In response to Heidegger's criticism of time, Byung-Chul Han holds a positive attitude of absorption, and even directly quotes his viewpoint in his book *Duft der Zeit*, which is to restore authenticity. The 'real' survival is 'slow' [5]. The present of authenticity is an innate

present, a present of authenticity born to death. Returning to the present of authenticity has one's own thoughts, daring to break through the control and influence of external environment, and living according to one's own heart.

To retrieve the time of existence through the existence of this being is actually to retrieve the time of existence in the authentic historical context, so that the busy and collapsing time under the domination of digital capital can return to the track of history and rediscover itself in the history of authentic existence. As a history with directional time, it prevents time from collapsing, that is, avoids the simple sequential alternation of scattered point realities [6]. In the trajectory of history, there is directional time, and in the time of survival, there will be no disintegration or collapse, nor will there be fragmented time and events. The ultimate goal is to have one's own time transformation from "I was bored by..." to "feeling bored in...", from non authenticity to authenticity, and to reconstruct back to this historical trajectory of survival in the time of accelerated collapse, with its own sustained time construction. In Heidegger's *Feldweg-Gesprache*, the first article discusses the relationship between summer, autumn, and winter among guides, researchers, and philosophers. The arrival of autumn implies the heat of summer, and winter is expected to arrive in the near future. Even the coolness of this autumn is associated with last year's autumn. Last year's autumn has passed, but the cool feeling on the field road this year is the feeling of autumn. The seasonal changes are witnessed by this rural road as it goes back and forth year by year; The collision of autumn and winter, spring and autumn, and the wisdom of the elderly and young in the same book *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* all occur on rural roads, which contain the authenticity and continuity of existence in the time of existence. The field road represents a clearly defined and continuous world that echoes within itself [7]. The clear planning of the seasons of spring and autumn is in stark contrast to the chaotic and chaotic world, where time rushes frantically in an unordered world. At this time, time is a non continuous time; In the real world with clear goals and plans, the time here is a continuous time of returning to the essence. The time of 'back and forth' is not only used to illustrate the continuity of time, but also to discuss the contemplative nature of returning to oneself on rural roads, and to stabilize oneself in contemplation.

Round trip time does not dissipate and is still a lingering time. In a clear time plan, it has its own rhythm of survival. It is a time that is people-oriented and full of freedom. Heidegger's round trip time provides strong support for Byung-Chul Han's benign time.

4. Chinese Incense: Duration

Incense, as one of China's cultural heritages that spans ancient and modern times, has a profound influence both domestically and internationally. In ancient China, "incense" had a time measurement system, with "one stick of incense" as the scale for measuring time, and incense represents a duration of time. In the process of burning incense, not only does the incense itself emit a charming aroma, but time also emits a fragrance. The burning of incense and the emission of fragrance do not disappear with the burning of incense, but rather fill the space.

It spatializes time, giving it a continuous appearance [8].

The time in this state has a fragrant aroma, and the process of incense turning into ashes is a slow rhythm. The entire process is a continuous state, and incense not only represents the persistence of burning, but also represents the persistence of emitting fragrance for a long time. The development of fragrance is inseparable from the path of fragrance. Fragrance is an objective existence, and fragrance is people's understanding, grasp, and application of fragrance. Fragrance is a scent that coexists with humans. Dao is a way and method, a belief and spiritual pursuit [9]. Fragrance is not only an excellent cultural heritage in real life, but also a spiritual food that keeps up with the times. The practical application of incense is visible and tangible cultural edification on the surface, but the incense road is more about internal spiritual cultivation, and is a summary of the spirit level of incense.

The development from the objective material "fragrance" to the spiritual level "fragrance path" reflects humanity's pursuit of spiritual connotation while satisfying material life. Xiangdao, as a methodology, exists in human life, and meditation is a necessary prerequisite for understanding Xiangdao. The scent of fragrance enters the brain through smell, and through stimulation of the brain's nerves, it produces a pleasant feeling for both body and mind. In a quiet environment, the restless heart slowly calms down, harmonizes the body and mind, and realizes life. The ultimate application of fragrance in human life is to embark on the philosophical path of fragrance, which endows human spiritual life with functions such as self-cultivation and cultivation of sentiments. The saying 'haste leads to waste' is a vivid manifestation of the entire process of savoring incense. It is not allowed to speak highly and discuss extensively at the incense table. It is necessary to maintain the quietness of the entire process to ensure that the person's spirit can be fully engaged during the fragrance tasting, thereby achieving self-cultivation and regulating the breath.

In today's digital age, bad times have caused modern people to be in a rush all the time. Influenced by the society of achievements, they constantly pursue utilitarian learning in their spare time for promotion and salary increase. They have little time to calm down and seek a quiet place in the noisy city to concentrate, recuperate, and reflect on the value of life. The spread and development of incense can make up for the regret of time passing by in human life. When savoring fragrance, it's not just about the aroma, but more about the incense. At the moment when the fragrance is emitted, the fragrance lingers for a long time, filling the space with time and stimulating the soul when inhaled and exhaled. Away from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, the busy pace slows down here and now, and the fragrant room is like a peaceful and beautiful peach blossom garden in Tao Yuanming's pen.

The duration is demonstrated in incense, and the entire process of enjoying the fragrance is a slow and continuous process. Interruption or one quick move can destroy the aesthetic presented by the fragrance. The fragrance emitted by Byung-Chul Han's works is thought-provoking, and the time it brings is stable within oneself, with the subject as the main focus. In a quiet incense room, maintaining a quiet

environment, people reminisce about the ups and downs of life as the wisps of green smoke disappear into the air, contemplating life. As the temperature of the incense burner changes, the fragrance also changes. Different fragrances bring different life experiences and emotional outbursts. In this long-lasting fragrance, people search for a rare peach blossom paradise in a society of achievement.

As an excellent Chinese culture with a thousand year history, Xiangdao has strong vitality and is not influenced by humans at any time or place. It fully displays its own brilliance and has its own spirit. So when time is at stake and human life is in crisis, Xiangdao provides a feasible and easy to operate path to redemption. Looking at the prospects of human society's development through the path of incense cultivation, fully valuing the spiritual redemption role of incense cultivation, so that humanity can regain a fragrant and free time.

5. Summary

Marx said, "Time is the space for human development. If a person does not have the freedom to dispose of their own time and spends their entire life serving capitalists except for necessary physiological interruptions such as sleep and food, then they are not as good as a heavy animal. They are just a machine that produces wealth for others [10]. The development of humanity cannot be separated from free time, which is the wealth of future social development.

So restoring the freedom of time and putting it back on its own track is the way to long-term social development. Byung-Chul Han analyzed the negative time under the domination of digital capital and concluded that the benign time with fragrant characteristics is the narrative time that has a clear boundary with labor time. It is a free time for humans to control and cultivate their body and mind on their own.

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