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ATTITUDE OF CHINESE RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY TOWARDS THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

We may assume five attitudes towards the animal kingdom: commercial, pragmatic, religious, aesthetic and scientific. Eastern philosophy as a whole is pragmatic, religious and aesthetic. Roughly speaking, Indian philosophy is more religious than Chinese philosophy, while the latter is more pragmatic and aesthetic than the former. In ancient China, Confucians were pragmatic and semi-religious towards all creatures; Moists were radically utilitarian and pragmatic but quasi-religious; Legalists were pragmatic, authoritarian and anti-religious; and Taoists were aesthetic and non-religious. Let us now compare Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist and Christian attitudes towards animals.

1. Confucianism

As an ardent advocate of humaneness, Confucius used rods instead of nets in fishing to avoid slaughter on a big scale, and refrained from shooting arrows at birds flying back to their nests. He was kind and noble in sharp contrast to avaricious poachers. But spirit of non-killing was far from harmless when compared with Indian non-violence (*ahimsa*). The degree of cruelty must be questioned: shooting birds flying away from nests might not be more humanitarian than shooting birds flying home.

For Confucius, man need not be a vegetarian. Animals should be sacrificed for gods, ancestors and ourselves. He accepted ten strips of dried meat as the minimum tuition fee, and wore robes made of the skins of sheep, deer and foxes. He admired the beautiful strips of the tiger and spots of the leopard, whose skins were too expensive to obtain. Having heard that a stable had

caught fire, he asked whether anybody was injured or hurt rather than if any horse was burned. One of his disciples wished to put an end to the rite of sacrificing sheep. He said to this kind-hearted pupil, "You love the sheep, I love the propriety." Confucius believed that sacrificial rites necessitated animal slaughter, and that the gods of the mountains and the streams particularly, would yearn for the meat of the calf with reddish brown skin and upright head and horn. Whenever presented with sacrificial meat, he bowed courteously to show respect for others' ancestors.

Confucius advised youths to learn the names of more animals and plants from the *Book of Odes*. However, he was too religio-ethical to classify and stratify creatures into hierarchies. It was a shame to keep company with birds and beasts. In *Confucian Analects*, creatures were always mentioned with ethico-political import. One student asked what filial piety was. Confucius said, "Nowadays filial piety means maintaining parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to render some support to their parents. Without reverence, how to discriminate the former from the latter?". Filial piety consists in spiritual respect towards ancestors and parents rather than material support. In Greek, Latin and English, there is not a single word that refers to filial piety, because the Western tradition reveres gods more than parents. In Confucian ethics, filial piety ranks first. A duke told Confucius once, "Among us here are those upright people who, if their father has stolen a sheep will bear witness to the fact." Reproaching this Legalistic and Moistic virtue, Confucius replied, "Among us in our region of the country, the upright people differ from yours. Uprightness lies in the fact that the father and the son mutually conceal the misconduct." It was ridiculous to spoil the cordial relation between father and son on account of casual misdeed. Was the sheep more important than the father?

"Killing a cock does not need the knife made for killing an ox." Confucius uttered this epigram to indicate that governing a small county needed no supreme principle of propriety and music. Besides, cock and ox, tiger and bison were used in the metaphorical sense. Fierce brutes, which symbolized irrational politicians, should be kept in cages. For Confucius, it was foolhardiness to fight a tiger with bare hands and to die without regret. This foolish fearlessness referred to ethico-political rashness or recklessness. The *Book of Rites* recorded that Confucius once compared tyranny to the ferocious tiger. A weeping woman told him about her tragic past. He sighed, "Tyranny is more ferocious

than a tiger!" Ethically and psychologically, dying men were compared to dying birds. Confucius said, "When a bird is close to death, its chirp is sorrowful; when a man is passing away, his words are sincere. "The spontaneous grief of birds was analogous to human honesty.

Being more anthropocentric and less religious than Confucius, Mencius affirmed the four beginnings of humaneness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom as the transcendental ground of becoming a sage which distinguished man from animal. He illustrated the universal, inherent ground of humaneness by citing bad king's instantaneous but spontaneous compassion for an ox which was to be sacrificed. Seeing that some superstitious people were going to consecrate a bell with its blood, the Emperor Hsüan of Ch'i said, "Release the ox, I cannot bear its frightened appearance, as if it were an innocent person approaching the place of death." Instead of cancelling the consecration of the bell, the superstitious king substituted a sheep for the ox. Mencius's main concern lay in the king's intrinsic kind-heartedness rather than in the observance of the conventional rite. Cultivating this innate goodness to the full, even a tyrant could become a sage-king! The relationship between superiors and inferiors should also be based on benevolence. If a sovereign treats his ministers like dogs and horses, then those ministers would in turn treat their sovereign like common people. In the worst case, if he regards them as earth and grass, they would regard him as a robber and an enemy. According to Mencius, if the prince considers his ministers to be his limbs, then they would consider him to be their belly and heart. It was a matter of disgrace for a king to overfeed horses and let his people suffer undernourishment.

Mencius degraded his philosophical adversaries unduly to the level of animals. Yang Chu's extreme egoism and anarchism would eliminate the king's political status, while Mo Ti's radical altruism would ignore the father's ethical position. Without sovereign and father, how could man be distinguished from animal? Mencius seemed to have disregarded the primitive society of the maternal system. At most, he deemed it an animal-community.

Shun, an ancient sage-ruler, was believed to have maintained harmonious relations with beasts like deer and boars since his boyhood. According to Mencius, Confucius topped all humans, just as the ch'i-lin (mythical mammal resembling half-horse and half-deer) ranked first among running beasts, and the phoenix excelled

all other flying birds. Confucius himself valued the ch'i-lin and the phoenix as omens of success and prosperity. The disappearance of the phoenix meant the shattering of an ideal. On hearing that a ch'i-lin had been caught in the west of China, Confucius stopped writing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

Far from advocating vegetarianism, Mencius wrongly believed that people over seventy years of age could never be satiated without eating meat. Meat pleased his mouth just as righteousness delighted his mind. The existential, moral option between a disgraceful life and a dignified death was likened to the dietary choice between fish and bear-paw, both of which were almost equally treasured. Averse to ride-and-hunt, Mencius wanted ferocious brutes like the tiger, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and venomous reptiles like the cobra to be driven away from civilized countries. But he desired that chicken, pig, dog, deer, fish and turtle should be kept and bred for food.

Like Confucius, Mencius despised fighting a tiger with bare hands. In the state of Ch'i, Feng Fu was reputed for his skill in grappling with tigers. Later, he became a famous scholar and happened to see some people chasing a tiger. Nobody dared to attack the tiger, they had to appeal to Feng Fu, who immediately bared his hands and alighted from his carriage. Mencius said, "The multitude were fond of him, while scholars jeered at him." It was possible to seize tigers, but impossible to catch fish by climbing trees. It was Mencius who first used the allegory "climb tree to secure fish" to mock at the folly of attempting to fulfil an impossible mission. Among Mencius's parables, ascetic life was depicted as the simple life of an earthworm which swallowed the soil above and drank the water beneath.

Hsün Tzu, a heterodox Confucian, resembled Aristotle in classifying creatures. For this naturalistic empiricist man's essence lies not only in being a featherless biped, but also in being able to classify objects. Gorillas were also bipeds without feathers, but their blood was drunk and their flesh was eaten by humans, because beasts lacked the system of relationships like between father and son, husband and wife. In the animal kingdom, only man could clearly distinguish between himself and his relatives through proprieties like paying respect to one's superiors. Mammals never forget their children especially when their cubs needed milk. In order to protect cubs, boars would fight tigers, and bitches would not roam afar. This was instinctive and not rational. As a rational

being, man should revere sages, otherwise he would be no better than an animal. On the other hand, a virtuous man must keep evil people at arm's length, otherwise he would risk his precious life like playing with tigers. Refuting the twelve thinkers of six heterodox schools, Hsün Tzu denounced two sensual hedonists as beasts. It was disgusting rather than shameful to have one's pigs stolen. Cunning thieves and bandits, particularly those learned, crafty but treacherous scholars, should not be entertained and allowed to come anywhere near us. We had better deem them wolves and tigers. Horses and fish had a special appeal for Hsün Tzu, who believed the legend that the fish in deep water swam up to enjoy the lyrical melody of a superb musician, and that six horses of a king's carriage rose to eat grain and enjoy music. He also believed in the legend, in the form of a poem, that phoenixes flew to the palace of Emperor Yao to celebrate this sage-king's brilliant success in politics. To all unsuccessful rulers, Hsün Tzu said, "In desperate situations, birds fight with beaks, brutes attack with paws, men resist with treachery. From ancient times to the present, nobody has tried his people's patience without endangering his own life." As for non-mythical birds, the *Book of Odes* said, "Storks sang in the marsh, the sound was audible in the heavens." He cited these birds to signify that the virtuous, despite poverty and solitude, would sooner or later become world-renowned and realize their ideals. In sharp contrast to the storks, tailor-birds were used to symbolize stupidity, since they wove their nests with reeds which would snap and break the eggs.

2. Taoism

Lao Tzu believed that both infants and sages were free from the danger of any injury from venomous insects and reptiles, ferocious brutes and birds; that in travel, sages would not encounter tigers and bisons. Big game chased in hunting caused hysteria. As a present or gift for sovereigns, Tao itself far excelled carriage-horses and giant pieces of jade. Nevertheless, Tao was so inhuman and ruthless that it treated all creatures as straw dogs to be discarded immediately after being used in sacrificial rites. Still humans ought necessarily to embrace or follow Tao just as fish must not leave water. If Tao prevailed, the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs would be mutually audible on the border of his idealized, small nations, without diplomatic relations, not to mention treaties and battles.

Being much more aesthetic and supra-humanistic than Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu valued the freedom of all creatures. Po Lo, an expert in appraising horses, was to blame for impairing their freedom and health. In the ideal world of Chuang Tzu's School, humans lived in perfect harmony with other creatures. Even Confucian sage-kings were accused of interfering with and ruining the natural wondrous orders prevailing among birds and beasts. Mutual forgetting in Tao was considered wiser than remembering each other, just as fish in water lived more happily than on the land where they had to spit saliva in each other's face for survival. Mutual interference always led to mutual torment. Instead of anatomizing fish to secure scientific knowledge, Chuang Tzu told Hui Shih, an empirical but dialectical sophist, that he understood fully the happiness of those swimming fish. However, he did not refrain from fishing. Once he went fishing, quietly declining a king's invitation to become his prime minister, announcing that he would rather be a tortoise wagging its tail in the mud than be an official of a complicated, dangerous government. He pitied the gigantic tortoise whose shell had predicted the future precisely 72 times but could not save the tortoise itself from being caught and killed. Laying utmost stress on personal survival, he first used the paradox "efficacious uselessness" to mean that uselessness for humans was efficacious for the longevity of any plant and animal. Tigers and leopards were killed for their fascinating skins, monkeys and cats were trapped on account of their agility, and birds were caged for their sweet songs.

Chuang Tzu skilfully utilized sentient being to exemplify wisdom and ignorance. Prejudiced monkeys kept by a monkey-fan, preferred four acorns in the morning and three at dusk to three acorns in the morning and four at dusk. Stupid tiny cicadas and birds laughed at the large birds which required much wind for flying. The self-conceited mantis waved its arm to withstand the approaching wheel. Although not self-conceited, a mantis attempted to catch a cicada, while it was itself going to be the prey of a yellow-bird lurking behind. Even Chuang Tzu, watching this bird amid chestnut trees, was mistaken for a poacher or a thief and rudely expelled from the garden. Besides, small pigs were wise in abandoning their mother's corpse because they loved her spirit rather than her body. The wisest fighting cock was so confidently boasting that no other cock dared to attack it. One arrogant monkey showed off its skill in grasping arrows shot at him. Unfortunately, a king ordered his attendants to shoot arrows simultaneously and killed it at once. This monkey was most agile

but most foolish. Human folly meant knowing just a part of the truth, like the narrow vision of a frog at the bottom of a well. It was a superstition that oxen with white foreheads and pigs with skyward nostrils should never be drowned in honour of the river-god. Apart from cleverness and folly, Chuang Tzu's wish was to become a butterfly roaming freely and fearlessly amid fragrant blossoms.

Like Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tzu advocated a rough, inconsistent theory of evolution, which was too mythical to be scientific despite some scientific insights. An old man of 90 regarded man as the loftiest and happiest of creatures. The similarity between man and tiger was that they loved those who took care of their livelihood. But men like Emperor Huang managed to employ fierce brutes as forerunners and carnivorous eagles and owls as banners, when engaged in a battle against Emperor Yen. Lieh Tzu also believed that supreme music moved beasts to dance, and attracted phoenixes and fish to rejoice. Like Hsün Tzu, he said, "Those who are able to eat but incapable of righteousness are chicken and dogs, those who fight with horns for food are animals. How can animals be respectable?" Under the influence of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tzu refuted teleology and anthropomorphism through the mouth of a boy of 12: "Mosquitoes suck our blood, tigers and wolves eat flesh. Were humans created by Heaven for mosquitoes? Was flesh produced by Heaven for tigers and wolves?"

3. Buddhism versus Christianity

Because of the Hindu belief in metempsychosis, Buddhists abstain from killing and eating sentient being i.e. all animals. Before attaining nirvana, sentient beings undergo cycles (wheels) of life and death in a hierarchy composed of six realms: beings in Heaven, humans, warlike demons, animals, hungry ghosts, beings in Hell. You should neither kill nor eat any creature which may be the incarnation or reincarnation of a person, particularly your beloved relative like your grandfather. This abstention reminds one of Pythagoras who dissuaded somebody from beating a dog on the ground that he recognized its bark as his bosom friend's voice. The Pythagorean School abstained from eating beans as they were considered to be ancestors' bones. Apart from the transmigration of souls, human compassion for the cosmic will-to-live accounts for non-killing. In *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, Śākyamuni refused to touch the meat of deer offered by a famous hunter. To his son Rāhula, the Buddha said, "All creatures fear swords and sticks, they love their own lives." A dove being chased by a hunter, still

trembled in the shadow of Śāriputra, the right-hand attendant on Śākyamuni. No sooner had the dove plunged into the Buddha's shadow than its fear and dread vanished. This miracle was due to the Buddha's complete abstinence from meat-eating. The same *sūtra* likened the human mind to that of monkeys which always choose and abandon objects, because their minds attach importance to externals. By the way, I would like to offer my intuition of this *sūtra*. First, its classification of births into four types, namely, womb, egg, wet, and metamorphosis is too crude, with overlappings. Second, it is erroneous to observe that, whether to kill an elephant or a hare, a lion exerts its total vitality without underestimating its quarry.

The *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* affirmed that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature and that even the bodhi-mind of birds may be awakened. Before reading the complete translation of this *sūtra*, Tao-sheng, an eminent Chinese disciple of Kumarajiva, claimed that all humans were endowed with Buddha-nature. Chi-tsang of the Three-treatise School asserted that plants have Buddha-nature. In the T'ien-t'ai School, Chih-i opined, "Every form and every odour are nothing but the way of the Mean." Chan-jan, the ninth patriarch, observed that even insentient beings were endowed with Buddha-nature. Taking its origin from Taoism, the Three-treatise and the T'ien-t'ai Schools, the Ox-head School of Ch'an Buddhism first used the epigram that "green bamboos are all *dharmakāya* (Buddha's essential substance), luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but *prajñā* (transcendental intuitive wisdom)." Why have plants never become Buddha? Because man's Buddha-nature infuses or penetrates into the whole universe including animals, plants, and minerals; the Buddha-nature of living beings other than humans depends on that of man, and therefore, cannot be cultivated. With great compassion for beasts and a strong sense of oneness with the universe, the Ox-head School maintained harmony with beasts and left their corpses for animals to feed on, although they were not so radical as to sacrifice the whole body to feed tigers or to chop off an arm to satiate eagles as in the *Jātakas* (myths and fables concerning the Buddha). Tao-lin, an Ox-head Ch'an Master, used to live on the branches of pine trees. Consequently, he was named Bird-nest Tao-lin. As an exception San-ch'uan P'u-yüan the Ch'anist killed a cat to enlighten quarrelling monks.

According to the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* the Buddha urged his disciples not to eat animal food, despite elsewhere giving ten rules for avoiding and three rules for accepting it. Probably Śākyamuni

prohibited meat-eating to the strictest extent in response to the critical challenge of other schools like the Jains and the Lokāyatas. Besides metempsychosis and compassion, the *Sūtra* suggested six reasons for abstention from meat: (a) Meat-eating causes an offensively poisonous smell in the skin of a Bodhisattva. (b) Animal killing horrifies prospective followers. (c) Devas or heavenly beings no longer sympathize with and protect a Bodhisattva who begins to eat meat. (d) Meat is filthy and apt to decay and then pollute nature. (e) Meat-eating contaminates the descendants. King Simhasaudāsa was dethroned as soon as he became a cannibal. Sakrendra, a celestial being, transformed himself into a hawk and chased a dove because of his past carnivorous misdeed. (f) No meat-eating, no butchers.

Profoundly inspired by the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, the Ch'an and the Pure-land Sects fully exhibited their compassion by releasing turtles, fish and birds. In the late Ming dynasty, Chu-hung of the Pure-land (Lotus) Sect promulgated non-killing and releasing life, attracting people with both supramundane principles of the Buddha, nirvāna, Kuan-yin (Avalokiteśvara) and P'u-hsien (Saman-tadhara) and worldly rewards of honours, riches and positions. A controversy raged between Buddhism and Catholicism. According to the Christian Genesis, God told Noah, a Hebrew leader, to make an ark (giant ship) to save his family and pairs of animals chosen from each species. Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit missionary who reached China in 1582, justified meat eating and detected some apparent, Buddhist inconsistencies: if any person or animal might be the reincarnation of one's own relatives, then one should never get married, employ a servant, ride horses and force cows to drag the cart or till the land. Otherwise, one might unconsciously commit patricide, homicide and adultery, to say nothing of violating the incest taboo. Ricci quoted Mencius's conservative sayings to support his anthropocentrism. In reply, Chu-hung emphasized that "might be our parents" vastly differs from "are our parents," denouncing Ricci's argument as sophistry or clever play on words. Further, he assimilated Confucianism by subsuming the Buddhist six perfections (*pāramitā*) under filial piety.

Buddhism and Taoism broadened the traditional Chinese mind of Confucian value system. As far as the animal kingdom is concerned we must perform scientific research in addition to aesthetic appreciation and pragmatic utilization. Religion and philosophy should not hinder zoology and medicine. On the contrary, they may be healthy urges for scientists to improve the animal Kingdom.