

Research on Zhuangzi's Philosophy of Animal Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Zhuangzi, a significant figure in Chinese Daoist philosophy, possesses a rich body of thought on animal ethics. Some scholars even argue that the text “Zhuangzi” is the earliest relatively systematic work on animal ethics in China. Generally speaking, Zhuangzi emphasizes conforming to nature and opposes human interference with the normal life activities of natural beings or the destruction of their innate characteristics. He acknowledges the intrinsic value of animals. Specifically, the philosophical foundation of Zhuangzi's view on animals can be summarized in two main points: First, “viewing things through the Dao, there is no distinction between noble and humble.” Zhuangzi believes that the “Dao” gave rise to all things in the world; humans, animals, and other forms of life, despite having different manifestations, inherently contain the essence of the Dao. Second, the unity of all things. Zhuangzi holds that the “Dao” connects all beings into an interlinked organic whole, where both humans and animals are indispensable components. Therefore, Zhuangzi argues that while adhering to the overall order of nature, one must respect the equality of individual lives. From a practical perspective, Zhuangzi advocates for respecting the inherent nature of animals, opposing the suppression of this nature for human needs or turning animals into objects of human servitude. Furthermore, he insists on adhering to the ethical principle of non-action (wu wei), discouraging excessive interference with nature and disrupting the ways animals live.

KEYWORDS

Zhuangzi, Animal Ethics, Daoist Philosophy, Natural Non-Action