

Beyond anthropocentrism and Natural-centralism— on the ecological ethics Thought of the Xi Ming

Fangbin Cui*

School of Philosophy and Religion Studies, Minzu University of China, Beijing, China

*Corresponding author: rye_cfb@qq.com

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Abstract: The ecological philosophies of Natural-centralism and anthropocentrism both regard human and nature as dichotomous and are unable to reconcile the issue of the relationship between human and nature. The idea of the oneness of man and nature in the Xi Ming does not assume a dichotomy between man and nature, and it is no longer relevant to judge what kind of doctrine it belongs to. The ecological ethics idea of the harmony of man and nature in the Xi Ming, which transcends anthropocentrism and naturalism, embodies the way of harmonious coexistence between man and nature under the path of the unity of heaven and man and the practice of Confucian benevolence.

1. Origin of the study

In 2005, the British scholar Peter Jay predicted in his *The Course of Wealth* that the population would reach 15 billion in the future, and it is difficult to imagine how the earth will be able to bear the weight. The more human civilization continues to progress, the more mankind's ability to conquer nature increases, and the more acute the conflict between man and nature becomes. Over-exploitation of energy, lack of resource use, global warming and the frequent occurrence of extreme weather have caused ecological damage and environmental pollution to deteriorate on a global scale, even threatening the future survival of mankind. The ecological dilemma has forced mankind to re-examine the issue of the relationship between man and nature, which is an ecological issue that has always existed since the birth of human civilization.

The growing ecological crisis has shown that anthropocentrism, with humans at the center of nature, has not been able to solve the problem of the relationship between humans and nature, and has therefore been criticized by ecologists. In contrast to anthropocentrism, Natural-centralism holds that humans are not superior to other creatures in nature, making it seem that the moral choice between humans and other creatures can only be resolved by a coin toss, falling into the Moist trap of concurrent love. The failure of both anthropocentrism and natural-centralism to address the relationship between humans and nature stems from the fact that they both see humans and nature as two opposing sides, as dualistic, rather than a monistic view of the oneness of humans and nature.

The relationship between heaven and man is a fundamental issue in Chinese philosophy, and Confucianism pursues the unity of heaven and man. The essence of the relationship between heaven and man is the question of the relationship between man and nature, that is, the question of ecology. When Zhang Dainian discussed the deeper meaning of "the people are my compatriots", he discussed the importance of maintaining ecological balance,^[1] but did not expand on it. Meng Peiyuan argues that Zhang Zai's statement of the unity of heaven and man is rich in ecological significance, "recognizing that nature has intrinsic value, and that nature's intrinsic value is achieved by human beings",^[2] and reveals the ecological and ethical orientation embedded in the Xi Ming.^[3]

On the basis of the acknowledgement that nature has intrinsic value, the Ximing contains the idea that man and nature are one, that man and all things are equal in the sense that life is connected, that we should respect nature and realize its value, a kind of deep ecology, and thus a kind of natural-centralism. On the other hand, the Xi Ming is an extension of Confucianism's circle of benevolence

and love, with human beings as the subject, the center and the starting point, constantly extending benevolence and love to all things in nature, and thus it is again anthropocentric. In fact, there is no need to distinguish between its natural-centralism and its anthropocentrism, for man and nature are a continuous community, and thus no longer a dualistic view of man and nature in opposition to each other. The Western Inscription contains an ecological and ethical idea of the harmony between man and nature that transcends anthropocentrism and natural-centralism, and provides inspiration for us to address the issue of the relationship between man and nature.

2. Anthropocentrism and natural-centralism

Anthropocentrism is a Western philosophical term that refers to "a human-centered relationship in which humans are dominating and natural objects are dominated, and the relationship between humans and natural objects is unequal."^[4] Under anthropocentrism, only man is the most noble in nature because of his "rationality"; the value of other creatures is determined by man, i.e., they have only "instrumental value" and not "intrinsic value". On the issue of the relationship between man and nature, the recent Western tradition of anthropocentrism is highlighted by the continuous exploitation of nature as a human resource and the endless competition for it, with human activities becoming the main source of the growing ecological and environmental problems of today.

According to Meng Peiyuan, "the separation and opposition between man and nature is the basic premise of anthropocentrism."^[5] From Descartes's "I think, therefore I am", human beings determine that the "I" exists as a thinking person and has intrinsic value. For human beings, nature, as the other distinct from the "I", can only establish value by appealing to human values, not to "intrinsic values" independent of human beings. From this perspective, man and nature are dichotomous; the establishment of intrinsic human value lies in man's ability to think rationally, while nature is other to "us" and can only be given value through man. The value of nature lies in its value to humans, and any value beyond that cannot be established because it has nothing to do with "me", and is therefore worthless, which also seems suspiciously egoistic.

In summary, anthropocentrism establishes man as the subject of value from a philosophical ontology, treats nature as other than man, and thus denies the intrinsic value of nature, a dualism in which man and nature are separated and opposed.

Following the growing prominence of ecological problems, nature-centrism, the antithesis of anthropocentrism, has dominated modern Western ecological philosophy. Nature-centrism holds that other beings in nature also have intrinsic values that are not dependent on humans, and that humans therefore also have direct moral obligations to other beings in nature that cannot be reduced to human beings. While avoiding the pitfalls of anthropocentrism, natural-centralism is still questionable. By attributing ecological problems to the results of human transformation of nature, it constrains human activity and limits human subjective agency. The belief in the intrinsic value of nature also makes it difficult to choose between the morality of human beings and that of other creatures in the natural world.

Natural-centralism is thus a move from the extreme of anthropocentrism to the other extreme. "The essence of the nature-centrism versus anthropocentrism debate is a choice between nature and man: should man dissolve nature, or should nature dissolve man? Or should man be 'made absolute' or should nature be 'made absolute'?"^[6] In fact, both natural-centralism and anthropocentrism assume the separation and opposition of humans and nature, exclude the unity of humans and nature, and cannot bring humans and nature into harmony, whichever extreme they go to.

3. The Eco-Ethical Thought of the Xi Ming

3.1 Nature has its own intrinsic value

According to Meng Peiyuan, "Zhang Zai speaks directly from the doctrine of life to the relationship between heaven and man, rather than the so-called ontological philosophy of the universe in general, and what Zhang Zai calls the doctrine of life is essentially a doctrine of virtue. Zhang Zai's doctrine of

virtue is not based on religious theology, nor on pure naturalism, but on the intrinsic value of nature."^[7] This intrinsic value is a self-contained value as distinguished from instrumental value. Instrumental value is the value that nature has because it meets human needs and interests, whereas intrinsic value is its own value that is not given by man and can exist apart from human needs. The recognition of the intrinsic value of nature is an important part of the unity of nature and man. So where does the intrinsic value of nature come from? "The word 'heaven' has multiple meanings, including the heaven of nature, the heaven of mastery and the heaven of value. According to Meng Peiyuan, the natural heaven is the fundamental meaning of "heaven". Heaven is the natural world of the universe. But it also has a transcendent meaning, i.e. the Heaven of Value. The sky of value is based on the sky of nature, i.e. the intrinsic value of the natural world comes from its naturalness and arises from the changes in its operation. "Nature is not only the source of human life and all life, but also the source of human values."^[8] In this sense, Meng Peiyuan highly affirms the value of "heaven". The value of "heaven" is based on naturalness, which means "to be born and to live". The intrinsic value of nature lies in the fact that "nature is a living organism, not only does it have life, but it is constantly creating new life"^[9]. The intrinsic value of nature therefore lies in its vitality and dynamism, its natural and continuous development.

3.2 Man and Nature as Unity

The unity of nature and man is the 'inner unity of man and nature'. From the material point of view, human life is born in nature and needs to survive in nature and be nurtured by nature. Zhang Zai's ontological doctrine of "Heaven and Man in One Breath" holds that Tai Xu, as the origin of heaven and earth, contains the "Supreme Reality", and that Tai Xu is the natural state of qi, which is gathered into all things and dispersed into Tai Xu. "All things in heaven and earth have qi as their essence, which then means that heaven, man and all things form a harmonious whole and organic system."^[10] Thus man and nature are also in such an organic whole. In terms of value, the heaven of nature and the heaven of value are one and the same heaven, i.e. the transcendent heavenly virtue of nature and the concrete life activity of nature's naturalness are united. Both human life and value are derived from nature. In the construction of the relationship between heaven and man, "A Confucian scholar is sincere because of his understanding, and he achieves understanding because of his sincerity. That is why heaven and man are united as one. One can become a sage through studies, and master heaven's law without losing understanding of man's law".^[11] The relationship between "sincerity" and "Ming" illustrates the inseparability of man and heaven. It is a reflection of the unity of nature and the Tao, and of the oneness of heaven and man. Therefore, Zhang Zai's doctrine of the unity of heaven and man contains at its root the idea of the oneness of man and nature.

In the first line of the Western Inscription, "Qian is called Father, Kun is called Mother; I am contemptuous, but I am in harmony."^[12] Nature is the source of human life, and Qian and Kun are heaven and earth. If we compare the universe and nature to a family, then heaven and earth are the parents and human beings are the children, who live in harmony within the family. Therefore, to refer to Heaven and Earth as parents is to reflect the meaning of Heaven and Earth as the source of life and the value of nature. "The phrase 'in harmony' expresses the inseparability between man and nature, that man and nature are a living whole, and that man is an organic part of the whole.

3.3 Man's reverence for nature

Based on the idea that nature has intrinsic value and that man and nature are one, the Xi Ming contains a reverence for nature and a sense of equality between man and all things.

"Therefore, what fills heaven and earth constitutes my body; what governs heaven and earth forms my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions."^[13] The phrase "what fills heaven and earth constitutes my body" means that the material Qi fills the space between heaven and earth, and that the Qi condenses to form people and things, and that in form, people and all things are formed by the condensation of Qi. "What governs heaven and earth forms my nature" means that the nature of heaven and earth is the command of all things in heaven and earth, and is the common source of the nature of man and all things. This corresponds to the "Qian and Kun as parents",

in which man and all things are derived from heaven and earth in both form and nature, and therefore heaven and earth are referred to as parents. This must be based on the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, the recognition that, on the basis of the value of life, human life and moral values are derived from nature, and that heaven and earth are therefore like the parents who give us life, and that the value of human life is derived from nature. In the process of the condensation of qi into man and all things, nature imparts its nature of heaven and earth to man, and it is from the nature of heaven that man derives his nature.

It is for this reason that man should have reverence for the natural world. Zhang Zai expresses the Confucian idea of reverence for the heavenly order with the saying " Qian and Kun as parents ", "Man has a close and reverent feeling towards nature just as he has towards his parents, and he also has the intention of repaying them." ^[14] In this interpretation, our reverence for nature is like the reverence we have for our parents, with respect, awe, and the closeness we have to nature as natural beings, just as we have to our parents by blood. Human beings also have an "emotional sense of life" for nature, not only in terms of the need to survive. In modern society, humans who have been living in a concrete world for a long time are full of longing for nature, and children are full of curiosity and closeness to nature, and our longing for nature is the result of the emotion of life, in line with the vibrant nature of life. Our reverence for our parents is motivated by our love for them, and our love for them is a matter of course, in line with our intuition and impulses. Heaven and earth, as the source of life and the parent of man, should also be covered by our moral ethics.

3.4 The meaning of equality between man and matter

In addition to its natural values, heaven and earth also have moral values. The Xi Ming not only acknowledge that man and all things are part of the community of life in the natural world of the universe in terms of natural values, but also extend the scope of morality and ethics to all things natural. In the sense that both human values and the source of life are natural, Zhang Zai refers to heaven and earth as his parents, so what is the connotation of " people are my brothers and all things are my kinds"? The phrase "all people are my brothers and sisters (min wu tong bao)" means that the people are my compatriots, and "all things are my companions(wu wu yu ye)" means that all things are my partners, where "all things are my companions" means that man is equal to all things. In terms of form, both man and all things are condensed from the material qi that fills heaven and earth; in terms of nature, both man's nature and the nature of all things are derived from the nature of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth are the parents of man and all things; man and all things are part of the community of life in nature; man and all things are "connected by one breath"; the value of life of man and all things is derived from the value of nature. "In the sense of the 'commonality of life', man and all things are equal." ^[15] It is in the sense that Confucianism recognizes the intrinsic value of nature and considers man and all things to be equal in the sense that they are connected in life that Meng Peiyuan considers Chinese philosophy to be deep ecology. ^[16] The Confucianism Gentleman treats people as fellow brothers and treats all things as partners, and this is "treating things with benevolence".

3.5 "people are my brothers and all things are my kinds (Min-Bao-Wu-Yu) " and "love has difference"

Although man and all things are children of heaven and earth, condensed from Qi, and the nature of man and all things is derived from the nature of heaven and earth, in the sense of life, man and all things are equal, this does not mean that man and all things are identical, nor does it mean treating other parents as if they were one's own parents, or treating the animals of nature as if they were human beings, thereby losing the distinction between parents and between man and animals. Yang Shi suggests, "I doubt that the Ximing speaks of the body but not of its use, and I fear that it will flow into universal love" In fact, what Zhang Zai's "people are my brothers and all things are my kinds" envisages is the highest realm of Confucian benevolence - "the benevolence of the unity of heaven and earth" - and is based on the premise of Confucian differential love, not the stream of Mohist parthenogenetic love. The realisation of Zhang Zai's "Min Bao Wu Yu" realm also follows the Confucian order of differential love, i.e. "love for loved one (Qin-qin) , benevolence (Ren-min), love

of things(Ai-wu)". The love of Qin-qin comes from natural emotions, and animals in nature also have such emotions, but human love for their loved ones has moral emotions in addition to natural emotions, and benevolence begins with love of family and extends to others to include them. "All things are my companions", in other words, it extends benevolence to the universe and nature, and brings everything in heaven and earth into the realm of morality and ethics, so as to realize the unity of man and matter. Therefore, just as there is a difference in love between human beings and nature, there is also a difference between love for fellow human beings and love for nature. In fact, this means that all things in nature should be included in our love of humanity and should be the object of our ethics.

In terms of the realization of the level of the people-creature and the realm, we must also recognize the difference between man and all things. "Since man is the most 'spiritual' and 'noble' of all things, he plays a decisive role in dealing with the question of man's relationship with nature."^[17] Man is dynamic, his value and nature comes from heaven, and he is the most spiritual of all creatures, and has the responsibility to realize the way of heaven, and thus the value of nature, by "doing in the way of humans". The intrinsic value of nature needs to be realized by human beings, who in turn derive their value from the intrinsic value of nature. In terms of the ability to realize value, there is clearly a difference between man and all natural things. In terms of the order of realization, there is also a clear difference between natural beings and human beings. The path of realization of human beings as moral subjects must be in accordance with the Confucian doctrine that there is a difference between love and equality. Between our own parents and the parents of others, we love our own parents more than the parents of others in accordance with our emotions and intuition; between our fellow human beings and natural creatures, we intuitively love our fellow human beings more. Skipping the moral progression that extends from the love of "Qin-qin" to love of things ignores our emotions. Therefore, in order to realize the unity of man and matter, we must, and can only, start from the human subject and expand the scope of benevolent love, otherwise we will have the problem of "talking about the substance but not the function" and "without Father". At the same time, the distant and near path of realization does not mean that there is a distinction between human beings and all things, but that the distant and near path is a requirement for moral practice to be carried out. "Man, as the being with self-consciousness, should take the attitude of Min-Bao-Wu-Yu toward man and other existence. It is not an alms given but a responsibility and a self-consciousness required. Man has right to treat with natural objects as means for his subjectivity and his anthropocentrism, that because man and matter in the unity of the two have different value. But this distinction is a distinction within the unity. Anthropocentrism should be subject to the theory of the unity of man and matter."^[18] In terms of its realization, the ecological thought embedded in the Xi Ming is the path of anthropocentrism, where the human subject realizes the value of the natural world, and where the human being is the center of moral feeling and expands outwards. Such anthropocentrism does not involve the domination of nature by humans as its master, by attaching natural values to human interests, because humans and nature are one and the same, and nature is the ever-expanding humans themselves. Therefore, this anthropocentrism does not dominate and rule nature with human interests alone as the centre, but rather, on the premise that man and nature are a community of life and recognise the intrinsic value of nature, with man as the main subject, from man himself and constantly realising the value of himself, others and nature as a whole, to achieve a harmonious state of unity between heaven and man.

4. Conclusion

On the value level, the Xi Ming recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, the idea that man and nature are one, and that as children of heaven and earth, man and all things are equal and different, so we can say that this is a deep ecology, a Natural-centered ecology; on the practical level, the Xi Ming says that the people and things are in harmony with each other, in line with Confucianism's differential love, and that man as a subject is constantly expanding the circle of benevolence to achieve harmony and unity between man and nature. Thus we can say that it is a kind of anthropocentrism. It is based on the idea that man and nature are all part of the natural world, and that man and all things are connected and interrelated. The ecological ethics thought contained in the Western Inscriptions does

not have the problem of anthropocentrism and Natural-centralism based on the assumption of the opposition between man and nature, and therefore it is not anthropocentric or natural-centric.

In response to the traditional anthropocentrism of dominating and ruling the natural world with human interests at the center, the ecological thought embedded in the Xi Ming is based on the unity of heaven and man as one with nature, where nature is the ever-expanding man himself and man and nature are a continuous living whole. At the same time, although man and nature are one, and both man and all things have value, we cannot realize all values at the same time. From the point of view of moral practice, the fact that human beings, as practical subjects, are sequential in the order of practice does not mean that there is a division of values into nobility and inferiority. The difficulty of deciding between the morality of human beings and that of other creatures in nature is reduced by recognizing the value of nature and by taking the human subject as the starting point for practice, and by not taking the interests of human beings as the criterion for judgement, but also by taking into account the value of nature.

Looking around the world, the world is undergoing major changes that have not been seen in a century. The new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial change is developing in depth, the new pneumonia epidemic has a far-reaching impact, and the concept of integrated development of ecology, production and life is presenting a new form of human civilization. "The fish live in the water and grass, the birds live in the forest" and "the sky has a limited time to nurture things and the earth has a limited time to produce money". Without the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature, the building of a community of human destiny will become an empty talk. The ecological ethics thought of the Xi Ming does not have the confrontation and separation of the relationship between man and nature, but is a transcendence of anthropocentric and natural-centric ecology based on the unity of heaven and man, through the practical path of Confucian benevolence, which renders its distinction between anthropocentrism and natural-centrism meaningless and provides new insights into the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.

"All things are born in their own harmony, and each is nurtured in its own way." "Man and nature should co-exist in harmony. When mankind protects nature in a friendly manner, nature is generous in return; when mankind plunders nature in a brutal manner, nature is merciless in its punishment. We must have a deep respect for nature, respect it, respond to it, protect it and build an earthly home where man and nature live together in harmony."^[19]

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