

Environmental Philosophy in Taoist Thought

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Abstract: Taoist thought attaches special importance to the relationship between man and the environment and man and nature. Taoist thought believes that “Tao” is the entity that constitutes the world, and that “Tao” is the driving force behind the creation of the universe, as well as the law of the movement of all things and the guidelines for human behavior. Taoist thought respects life and believes that all things should be allowed to grow naturally, without claiming them for oneself or dominating them. Taoism believes that all things are equal, and this principle of equality is similar to that of life-centered ethics. This principle of equality is similar to that of life-centered ethics. Taoism believes that the pursuit of material desires should be reduced in favor of raising the spiritual level, which provides a very good theoretical basis for environmental ethics and how to solve environmental issues.

Keywords: Taoism;Environmental Ethics;Environmental Philosophy

Introduction

In order to solve the contradiction between environment and development, the ancient Chinese Taoist eco-ethical thought has received great attention and esteem from Western scholars. Taoist thought is the most famous environmental thought in Eastern culture, and even influenced the establishment of Naess’ Deep Ecology doctrine, which is the most familiar Eastern environmental thought to Western environmental scholars. Many Western scholars have paid early attention to the Chinese Taoist tradition of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, and have given it a fairly high rating. Some ecological thinkers believe that Taoism “provides the true philosophical basis for an ecological society and offers a solution to the ancient confrontation between man and nature.

Taoist thought attaches special importance to the relationship between man and the environment and man and nature. In addition to theoretically exploring the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, Taoists throughout history have also made some attempts in practice on how to achieve the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, that is, the organic integration of nature and humanity. This article introduces: Taoism’s holistic view, Taoism’s respect for life , Taoism’s ecological and environmental view , Taoism’s conformity to nature, and Taoism’s attitude toward life .

1. A holistic view of Taoism

Both Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu consider Tao as the entity that constitutes the world, and Tao is the driving force behind the creation of the universe, as well as the law of motion of all things and the guideline for human behavior. Therefore, the supreme truth contained in Tao is the object of pursuit and learning for everyone. “The meaning of the Tao, from the environmental perspective, is that the Tao is the basis of natural ecology.^[1]

“The Tao has two characteristics: transcendence and immanence. According to Lao Tzu , the Tao is beyond the scope of sensory perception. “The Tao can also be expressed as a real thing with images, which is omnipresent . Laozi believes that heaven and earth are in harmony, and Zhuangzi believes that heaven and earth and all things are in unity with me.^[1]

2. Taoism’s Respect for Life

The “Tao” in Taoism’s thought is very similar to the “entity” in Western philosophy, but the biggest difference lies in the fact that the “Tao” can nurture all things. Laozi believed that all things should be allowed to grow naturally, without taking them for oneself or dominating them. Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu also value the law of equality, that all things are equal. Moreover, under this principle of equality, only the “good man” can obtain the “Tao”. This principle of equality is similar to the proposition of Biocentric

Ethics.^[2]

3. Taoism's Ecological Laws

Laozi and Zhuangzi mentioned many laws of the movement of heaven and earth, the four seasons, day and night, yin and yang. Under such regular movement, all things can grow and change with the environment to achieve due change and order, so that all things in heaven and earth can coexist in harmony.^[3]

The concept of ecological civilization proposed in today's society is in fact an idea of harmony between human beings and nature, the essence of which is to integrate human social systems into the natural ecosystem and constitute the harmony of a broad ecosystem, and these ideas coincide with the ecological view of Taoist thought.^[3]

4. Taoism of following nature

Taoism thought that man should follow the Tao and nature and not violate the laws of natural movement. Although human technology is well advanced, our understanding of nature as a whole is still quite limited because the interconnections and material cycles in the ecosystem are too complex and delicate to be controlled by human beings. Moreover, the power of nature is too great for humans to contend with. Therefore, we must be humble, respectful, and responsive to nature.^[4]

Anything that man gains must come at a price. In other words, the ecosystem is connected and forms a whole, and it is impossible to create something from nothing or disappear arbitrarily in this whole. Therefore, human beings use technology to improve their living standards, but the environmental pollution caused in the process will gradually accumulate and eventually threaten the survival of human beings, and this is the price that human beings pay for destroying the environment.^[4]

Although the use of technology to control nature can temporarily improve human life, it also creates environmental pollution, which will eventually make humans pay the price and reap the evil consequences. Therefore, we should be humble and respect and respond to nature.^[5]

5. Taoist attitude towards life

Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu valued "mindfulness and environmental protection" and lived a simple life. Both Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu believe that the pursuit of materialistic desires should be reduced in favor of raising the spiritual level. The teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi provide a very good theoretical basis for environmental ethics and how to solve environmental issues, especially their attitude of living with "less desire and contentment".

Therefore, we must learn from Laozi and Zhuangzi's attitude towards life and pursue spiritual happiness and satisfaction in order to solve the environmental problems at the root.

Lao Tzu believed that the pursuit of external material desires would cause one to lose one's original spirituality. Therefore, we should reduce our desires and live a contented and simple life. Lao Tzu believed that there is no need to pursue fame, fortune and wealth from the outside, because contentment is the true wealth.

Lao Tzu's thought points out the root cause of today's environmental problems: because human beings are often unable to be satisfied with the pursuit of materialistic desires, they constantly exploit natural resources, consume them, and pollute the environment in the process of manufacturing products. Therefore, from Lao Tzu's point of view, we must first do a good job of "mindfulness and environmental protection" before we can change the existing environmental situation and completely solve the environmental problems.

Both Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu emphasize the attitude of doing nothing, not striving, not demanding, and not seeking one's own self-interest. Lao Tzu believed that life should be lived with an attitude of "no-action", without striving, without seeking, without selfishness, and without self-interest in all things. However, "no-action" is not extinction, it should be in accordance with nature, and after it is in accordance with nature, positive results can be achieved.

Taoists believe that one should return to simplicity and truth, not to have a mind, and to forget all worries. Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu believe that if one seeks outwardly for material desires, not only will one's spirituality be depleted, but in the process of pursuing fame and fortune, one will also engage in treacherous and hypocritical misconduct. The wisdom mentioned here refers to small wisdom or inappropriate mind, but not the great wisdom of "No-Action".^[6]

Therefore, people should get along with each other without being clever or improperly scheming, in order to seek their own spiritual happiness. If we look at today's technology from the perspective of Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu, it may be considered as a small wisdom, because mankind abuses technology for their own immediate benefit, and it is still doubtful whether this is a positive benefit to mankind.

Conclusion

The ecological view of Taoist thought emphasizes the need for man to live together with all things ecological and natural, and the natural ecological balance between heaven, earth and man. Taoist thought reminds people to respect life, treat all things well, and care for nature.

The ecological philosophy of Taoist thought formulates many moral codes and codes of conduct to regulate people's activities toward nature, puts forward the requirements for protecting the environment, and makes Taoist principles the articles that must be observed. The message of these elements to people is to treat nature well and beware of nature's revenge on man.

From the above discussion, it is clear that human beings should reduce the pursuit of material desires and instead raise the level of spirituality, and should follow the Tao and nature and not violate the laws of natural movement of all things. In other words, we should live a life with less desire and in accordance with nature, so as not to cause damage to the environment.

The ideas of Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu have inspired the scientific community today, as most scientists still believe that humans can use technology to transform nature. In times of depletion of resources and environmental pollution, resulting in a decline in the quality of life, it is also believed that efforts to develop technology can solve environmental pollution and find alternative energy sources to improve the quality of the environment again.

Today's human beings and the scientific community should not rely entirely on technology to solve environmental problems, nor should they believe that technology is omnipotent. Instead, they should carefully consider the words of Lao Tzu as well as Zhuang Tzu and stop creating pollution and pursuing materialistic desires. We should protect the ecological environment so that people's living environment can be saved from the doom of increasing deterioration.

The concept of ecological civilization proposed in today's society is in fact an idea of harmony between man and nature and man and man. In essence, it is the integration of human social system into the natural ecosystem, constituting the harmony of a broad ecosystem, and these ideas coincide with the ecological view of Taoist thought.

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