

# **Do Humans and Animals Innately Possess Morality, and Are Animals Capable of Moral Actions Like Humans?\***

- A Comparison of Matteo Ricci and Zhu Xi

**Research Professor Yi Jongwoo** (HK+ Center in the Institute of Japanese Studies, Dankook University at Jukjeon)

- I. Introduction
- II. Do Both Humans and Animals Innately Possess Morality?
- III. Can Animals Commit Moral Actions Like Humans?
- IV. Conclusion

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21050/CSE.2024.59.11>

---

\* This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea.  
(NRF-NRF-2017S1A6A3A01079180)

---

 • 국 문 초 록 •
 

---

## 인간과 동물은 선천적으로 선하고 동물도 인간처럼 도덕적 행동을 할 수 있는가?: 마테오 리치와 주희 비교

이종우 (단국대학교 죽전캠퍼스 일본연구소 HK+사업단, HK연구교수)

인간은 선천적으로 도덕성을 갖고 있는가? 더욱이 동물도 인간과 같이 그러한가? 이러한 주제들은 동서고금을 통하여 중요한 주제이다. 이에 대하여 마테오 리치는 주희를 비판했고, 따라서 본고에서는 그들의 주장들을 비교한다. 마테오 리치에 따르면, 최고선인 천주가 오직 인간에게만 도덕성을 부여했기 때문에 인간만이 선천적으로 선하지만 인류 최초 조상인 아담의 원죄로 인하여 악이 유전되었고, 이 때문에 인간은 선과 악을 선택하여 선행과 악행을 모두 할 수 있다고 한다. 이와 반대로 동물은 그러한 도덕을 선천적으로 갖고 있지 않으며 오직 본능만이 선천적으로 갖고 있는데 왜냐하면 천주가 그것만을 부여했기 때문이다. 따라서 동물은 도덕적 행동을 할 수 없다. 마테오 리치와 달리 주희에 따르면, 인간과 동물 모두 선천적으로 도덕적 행동을 갖고 있는데 왜냐하면 만물은 순선(純善)한 리(理)에 근거하여 기(氣)의 운동으로 인하여 생성되었기 때문이다. 다만 인간은 모든 도덕, 동물은 그것들 중에서 하나의 도덕만을 갖고 있으며 이 때문에 인간은 모든 도덕적 행동을 할 수 있으나 동물은 오직 하나의 도덕적 행동만을 할수 있다고 한다. 예를 들어 호랑이와 이리는 어미가 새끼를 사랑하는 도덕적 행위로서 인(仁), 벌과 개미는 통치자에게 충성을 다하는 도덕적 행위로서 의(義)를 선천적으로 갖고 있고 그것을 행동한다. 왜냐하면 인간의 기는 온전하지만 동물의 기는 편벽되어 있기 때문이다. 하지만 마테오 리치는 주희의 리개념을 비판하였다. 왜냐하면 그 리는 사물에 내재하여 의존하고 있는 존재로서 천주와 같이 만물을 창조할 수 없다고 여겼기 때문이다. 마테오 리치의 이러한 관점은 천주가 만물을 창조했다는 믿음에 근거한 것인 반면에 주희의 그러한 관점은 리에 따라 기의 운동으로 인하여 만물이 생성되었다는 자연법칙에 근거한 것이다.

주제어: 도덕성, 천주, 리(理), 천주교, 신유학

---

## I. Introduction

Recently, interest in animal ethics with human ethics has been increasing. But how did ethical scholars view this topic in the past? Therefore, this paper will compare the perspectives on human and animal ethics held by Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇, 1552-1610), a Catholic missionary dispatched to the Ming 明 Dynasty (1368-1644), and Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), a Neo-Confucian scholar of the Song 宋 Dynasty (1127-1279). I investigate their arguments on whether humans and animals are naturally endowed with morality and whether animals can perform moral actions.

In this regard, Back Youngsun interpreted Zhu's views on human and animal nature as both having morality.<sup>1)</sup> However, according to Zhu's *Annotations of Mencius (Mengzi jizhu 孟子集註)*, human nature was endowed with morality while animal nature was not, meaning humans can commit moral actions but animals cannot. Therefore, Back missed this distinction. Furthermore, Back argued that both Zhu agreed on the need to protect animals.<sup>2)</sup> However, Zhu expressed concerns about people being bitten by tigers,<sup>3)</sup> indicating that Back overlooked these points.

Jung Hyunsoo<sup>4)</sup> overlooked the idea that humans are born with

---

1) Back Youngseon, "Are animals moral?: Zhu Xi and Jeong Yakyong's views on nonhuman animals", *Asian Philosophy* 28.2(2018), 97-116.

2) Back Youngseon, 113.

3) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei 朱子語類*, 138.

4) Jung Hyunsoo, "Cheonju sireui e natanan Matteo Ricci eui inmulseong dongiron yeonku" (A Study on the Matteo Ricci's theory on the Inmulseong-dongiron

Adam's original sin and thus innately possess both good and evil in Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven)

## II. Do Both Humans and Animals Innately Possess Morality?

According to Ricci, *tianzhu* 天主 (the Lord of Heaven) creates all things,<sup>5)</sup> including humans and animals, making Him the supreme good<sup>6)</sup> and the source of morality.<sup>7)</sup> Ricci regarded the Lord of Heaven as goodness because He created all things, and as the supreme good, He endowed humans with innate goodness.

“Human nature is inherently good.”<sup>8)</sup>

By contrast, Ricci argued that the Lord of Heaven has bestowed upon humans the ability to choose between good and evil.

“When the Lord of Heaven bestowed this nature on human being, human being was capable of doing both good and evil, and human being

---

shown in De Deo Verax Disputatio), *Inmun gwa yesul* (Humanities and Art)3(2016), 121-144.

- 5) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義上.3, 首篇論天主始制天地萬物而主宰安養之. This reference is based on *The Bible(The Holy Bible)*(Illinois: Crossway Wheaton, Kindle Edition, 2019), “The Creation of the World”, GENESIS 1:27), 30).
- 6) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.172, 天主者自然中於的者也, 有至純之善.
- 7) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上.113, 為道德之源也.
- 8) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.438, 然本性自善. This mention by Ricci was based on *the Bible*: Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”(“The Creation of the World”, GENESIS1:26, p.30).

was enriched thereby. Because human being can take or reject goodness, not only is the merit of goodness increased, but that merit becomes human being's own."<sup>9)</sup>

Ricci's argument, which posits that humans have an innate free choice between good and evil, contains a contradiction regarding humans being innately endowed with goodness. Why are Ricci's statements contradictory? Because the evil action of the first ancestor of mankind, Adam, transmitted evil to humanity. If humans were innately endowed with morality as the Lord's supreme good, Adam would not have committed the evil action. Therefore, Adam did not innately possess the supreme good of the Lord but a goodness that merely resembled it, just like current humans. Thus, humans are innately endowed with both good and evil, allowing them to choose between the two, which means they have free will.

---

9) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.446, 天主賦人此性, 能行二者, 所以厚人類也, 其能取舍此善, 非但增為善之功, 尤俾其功為我功焉. ; Translated by Lancashire and Hu, *The true Meaning of the Lore of Heaven*(St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, in cooperation with The Ricci Institute Taipei, 1985), 351. This mention of Ricci was influenced by Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (1.83, 1141), and Aquinas was influenced by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by W.D. Ross, Amazon Kindle Edition, 2017, 864; Baker, "Thomas Aquinas and Chong Yagyong: Rebels Within Tradition," *Tasan hak* (Journal of Tasan Studies) 3, 2002). According to Augustine (354-430), Adam and Eve sinned by not worshipping God and by enjoying their freedom (Augustine, *City of God*, in *The Complete Works of St. Augustine*, translated by Philip Schaff, Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2019, 3011). Therefore, the original sin of Adam and Eve (The Holy Bible, "The Fall," Genesis 3:1-24, 33-35) was committed by their own free will, which implies that free will was bestowed by God.

“The human’s first ancestor had already corrupted the roots of human nature so that later generation of sons and grandsons all suffered residual harm and were unable to receive perfect nature. There were imperfections from the moment of birth.”<sup>10)</sup>

The choice between good and evil is made possible by intelligence (Ling 靈). Therefore, Ricci regarded humans as possessing intelligence, while animals do not.

“Of all things which mark off all men as being different from animals, none is greater than the intelligence (Ling 靈). The reason can distinguish between right and wrong.”<sup>11)</sup>

Why did Ricci argue that only humans possess intelligence? Because the Lord has the highest intelligence (*zhi ling* 最靈), He nurtures all creatures<sup>12)</sup> and enables humans to nurture other creatures. Thus, He bestowed intelligence only on humans and not on animals. Ricci argued that this divine intelligence grants humans the ability to choose between good and evil. He believed that humans’ ability to commit good and evil actions is based on free will; without free will, they could not per-

10) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.717, 世人之祖已敗人類性根, 則為其子孫者沿其遺累, 不得承性之全, 生而帶疵; Translated by Lancashire and Hu, p. 447. This reference is based on *The Bible(The Holy Bible*, “The Creation of the World”, GENESIS 3:1-22), 33-35).

11) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上.14, 凡人之所以異於禽獸, 無大乎靈才也. 靈才者, 能辯是非, 別真偽; Translated by Lancashire and Hu, 69).

12) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.714, 天主始制創天地, 化生人物. This reference is based on *The Bible (The Holy Bible*, “The Creation of the World”, GENESIS 1:1-27, 30).

form these actions. According to Ricci, the human intellectual soul can observe matters and things, discerning their right and wrong or good and evil. This indicates that humans originally possessed the intelligence to distinguish between good and evil.

“The most superior of the souls is called the intellectual soul. This is the soul of man which includes the vegetative soul and the sentient soul. It enables people to grow to maturity; it causes people to be aware of things outside themselves, and it allows people to make inferences as to the nature of things and to distinguish between one principle and another.”<sup>13)</sup>

Humans innately possess intelligence, the source of reason, making them superior to the souls of other creatures. This sets them apart from animals, which have only a sentient soul, considered the second class of soul. Why are their levels of souls innately different? Because the Lord of Heaven bestowed intelligence solely on humans so they could rule over all creatures. Thus, He did not grant this intelligence to the souls of animals or vegetation. Ricci classified three kinds of souls: the lowest class of vegetative soul in plants, the second class of sentient soul in animals, and the highest class of intellectual soul in humans.<sup>14)</sup> Therefore, humans can govern other creatures, according to Ricci.

---

13) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上, 328, 上品名曰: 靈魂, 即人魂也. 此兼生魂, 覺魂, 能扶人長養及使人知覺物情, 而又使之能推論事物, 明辨理義. ; Translated by Lancashire and Hu, 145.

14) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上, 59-63, 吾人生於其間: 秀出等夷, 靈超萬物... 下至飛走鱗介諸物, 為其無靈性, 不能自置所用, 與人不同... 又下至一草一木, 為其無知覺之性.

“We human beings, the most excellent and most intelligent creatures in all creation, live in the midst of all this. The human beings were endowed with the Five Basic Virtues in order that he might control the things of this world.”<sup>15)</sup>

Humans control all things because the Lord of Heaven bestowed intelligence upon them to govern everything. However, Ricci argued that the Lord both created and governs all things.<sup>16)</sup> This presents a contradiction in Ricci's arguments. Why did Ricci argue this way? Because he believed that the Lord, being the supreme intelligence, governs all things. Ricci thought that the Lord bestowed His own intelligence solely on humans to enable them to govern. Why did Ricci not believe that the Lord governs all things directly? Because the Lord cannot be known through the senses but only through reason.

Unlike Ricci, Zhu Xi wrote in the *Mengzi Jizhu* (孟子集註, The Annotations of Mencius) that humans are innately endowed with Four Virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom: *ren, yi, li,* and *zhi* 仁義禮智), but animals are not endowed with these morals.

From the point of view of psychophysical stuff (*qi*), it would seem that human beings and other creatures, in their perceiving and moving, are no different. But from the point of view of principle (*li*), can other creatures possibly receive the complete endowment of true goodness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom? This is why human nature is always good and is

15) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上, 59, 吾人生於其間: 秀出等夷, 靈超萬物; 稟五常以司眾類; Translated by Lancashire and Hu, 79

16) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上, 4, 論天主始制天地萬物而主宰安養之.

the guiding spirit of the ten thousand sand things. Gaozi does not understand human nature is principle but takes it as corresponding to psycho-physical stuff.<sup>17)</sup>

Unlike in *Mengzi Jizhu*, in *Zhongyong Zhangju* (中庸章句, The Annotations of the Doctrine of the Mean), Zhu Xi regarded both humans and animals as innately endowed with morality. This morality, or *li*, is the source of the Five Virtues: humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness (*ren, yi, li, zhi, and xin* 仁義禮智信). *Zhongyong Zhangju* is Zhu's commentary on *Zhongyong* (中庸, The Doctrine of the Mean), one of the Confucian classics and one of the Four Books, which also include *Daxue* (大學, The Great Learning), *Lunyu* (論語, The Analects), and *Mengzi* (孟子, Mencius).

Heaven, through transformation of *yin* and *yang* and the five activities, engenders the myriad things: *qi* (energy) completes their form and pattern-principle is indeed endowed therein. It is as if it had been ordered. And so it is that at birth each person, receiving his endowed *li*(pattern-principle), is constituted of firm [hexagram qian], yielding [hexagram kun], and five constant virtues [i.e., humaneness (*ren* 仁), rightness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and trustworthiness (*xin* 信)]. This is what we call 'the nature.'<sup>18)</sup>

---

17) Zhu Xi, *Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集註, p. 663, 然以氣言之, 則知覺運動, 人與物若不異也。以理言之, 則仁義禮智之稟, 豈物之所得而全哉? 此人之性所以無不善, 而為萬物之靈也。告子不知性之為理, 而以所謂氣者當之。; The Four Books, translated by Daniel Gardner (Oxford University Press, Kindle Edition, 2007), 1126-1130.

18) Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句, 769, 天以陰陽五行化生萬物, 氣以成形, 而理亦賦焉, 猶命令也。於是人物之生, 因各得其所賦之理, 以為健順五常之德, 所謂性也。

Zhu wrote that animals are innately endowed with morality as well as humans because he believed that all things, including humans and animals, were created through the movement of *qi* following *li*.<sup>19)</sup> According to Zhu, *li* is the source of morality,<sup>20)</sup> implying that creatures, both humans and animals, possess morality inherently.

In the *Zhongyong zhangju*, Zhu argues that both humans and animals possess morality innately, suggesting their nature is fundamentally the same.<sup>21)</sup> This contrasts with Ricci, as he supported Mencius' assertion that human and animal natures are distinct.<sup>22)</sup>

The nature of humans and animals presented in *Mengzi jizhu* and *Zhongyong zhangju* written by Zhu appears contradictory. *Mengzi jizhu* was authored when Zhu was 48 years old,<sup>23)</sup> while *Zhongyong zhangju* was written twelve years later when he was 60 years old.<sup>24)</sup> After the *Zhongyong zhangju* was written, Zhu Xi discussed in the *Zhongyong huowen* (中庸或問 The Questions of the Doctrine of the Mean) that humans were innately endowed with all morals, while animals were endowed

---

; Translated by Gardner, p. 191.

19) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 1.13, 蓋氣則能凝結造作, 理卻無情意, 無計度, 無造作. 只此氣凝聚處, 理便在其中. 且如天地間人物草木禽獸, 其生也, 莫不有種, 定不會無種子白地生出一箇物事, 這箇都是氣. 若理, 則只是箇淨潔空闊底世界, 無形跡, 他卻不會造作; 氣則能醞釀凝聚生物也. 但有此氣, 則理便在其中.

20) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 1.11, 無是氣, 則是理亦無掛搭處. 氣則為金木水火, 理則為仁義禮智.

21) Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句, 769

22) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下.425, 孟子曰: 人性與牛犬性不同. 解者曰: 人得性之正, 禽獸得性之偏也. 理則無二無偏, 是古之賢者固不同性於理矣. 釋此, 庶可答子所問人性善否歟?

23) Wang Maohong, *Zhu Xi nianpu* 朱熹年譜 (北京: 中華書局, 1998), 76.

24) Wang Maohong, 197-198.

with only one of those morals. For example, tigers and wolves were innately endowed with love for their cubs, which symbolizes benevolence (*ren* 仁); bees and ants with the sense of rightness (*yi* 義) between king and subjects; otters with propriety (*li* 禮) towards their ancestors; and ospreys with chastity between males and females (*zhi* 智).

Although the bodies of birds, animals, and plants are imperfect, unlike the human body, their perception do or do not be active, and the beginning and end of that perception and movement follows their nature, so there is *li* 理 (principle). Therefore, tigers and wolves have innate benevolence between mothers and cubs, bees and ants have innate righteousness between rulers and subjects, otters have innate ancestor worship, and ospreys have innate chastity between males and females.<sup>25)</sup>

In *Zhongyong zhangju*, Zhu wrote about both the nature of humans and animals were innately endowed with the Five Virtues (humaneness, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness), meaning all morals. Unlike that book, in *Zhongyong huowen*, he wrote about humans being innately endowed with the Five Virtues, but animals were endowed with only one. These two books represent Zhu's interpretation of *Zhongyong*, yet Zhu's mentions on the nature of humans and animals differ. Why did he write this way? Because, in *Zhongyong zhangju*, the nature of humans and animals meant only *li* 理 (principle), whereas

---

25) Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong huowen* 中庸或問, 550-551, 雖鳥獸草木之生, 僅得形氣之偏, 而不能有以通貫乎全體, 然其知覺運動, 榮悴開落, 亦皆循其性而各有自然之理焉。至於虎狼之父子, 蜂蟻之君臣, 豺獺之報本, 雉鳩之有別, 則其形氣之所偏, 又反有以存其義理之所得, 尤可以見天命之本然, 初無間隔, 而所謂道者, 亦未嘗不在是也。

in *Zhongyong huowen*, it meant *li* inside *qi* 氣 (material force). According to his mention after the age of 59, humans have been innately endowed with the Five Virtues, but animals are endowed with only one.<sup>26)</sup> There is a contradiction between Zhu's books because humans' and animals' having been innately endowed with *li* is the same, but humans' *qi* is perfect whereas animals' is imperfect.<sup>27)</sup>

The source of all things is *li*, as mentioned by Zhu, and the Lord of Heaven, as mentioned by Ricci. Therefore, both *li* and the Lord of Heaven are the sources of goodness. All things are created by the movement of *qi*, with *li* serving as the principle behind this movement. *Li* is an impersonal existence, whereas the Lord of Heaven creates all things and is a personal God. Thus, all creatures innately possess *li* and were thereby endowed with morality. Due to the body, humans were endowed with all morals, but animals were endowed with only one moral, according to Zhu. However, Ricci argued that humans have innate intelligence, whereas animals have instinct rather than intelligence; therefore, humans can choose between good and evil, but animals cannot. Thus, humans can commit both good and evil actions, whereas animals cannot perform good actions, according to Ricci.

26) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 62.46, 虎狼之仁, 螻蟻之義, 卽五常之性, 但只稟得來少, 不似人稟得來全耳.

27) Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong huowen*, p. 550. Regarding Zhu's view on the nature of humans and animals, Le Aiguo has interpreted that there is a difference in *qi* within the sameness of *li* and a difference in "li" within the sameness of *qi*, and this implies having differences within sameness and sameness within difference. (Le Aiguo, "朱熹论人与物的异同 '贵贱和平等'" (Zhu Xi's View on Difference, Common Point, High, Low and Equality between Humans and Animals), 社会科学战线, 2017), 16).

Accordingly, Ricci critiqued Zhu's argument.

“If I were to inform foreign scholars that a number of Confucian scholars in China assert that birds, beasts, grass, trees, metal, and stone are all endowed with an intellectual nature and are to be put in the same category as human beings, would this not cause them considerable surprise?”<sup>28)</sup>

This is Ricci's critique of Zhu's argument that both humans and other creatures have been inherently endowed with *li*, the source of morality.<sup>29)</sup>

### III. Can Animals Commit Moral Actions Like Humans?

According to Ricci, animals cannot commit moral actions because they have been innately endowed with only instinct, not morality, whereas humans inherently have a free choice between good and evil. Therefore, humans can commit both good and evil acts. Why did Ricci claim that only humans can do good acts, not animals? Because he asserted that the Lord of Heaven bestowed the ability to choose between good and evil solely to humans, while animals were given only physical instincts.

“The Lord of Heaven bestowed this nature on humans, humans were capable of doing both good and evil, and humans were enriched thereby.

---

28) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 上, 547, 如吾於外國士傳: 中國有儒謂鳥獸草木金石皆靈, 與人類齊. 豈不令之大驚哉?

29) Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong zhangju* 1, 天以陰陽五行化生萬物, 氣以成形, 而理亦賦焉, 猶命令也. 於是人物之生, 因各得其所賦之理, 以為健順五常之德, 所謂性也.

Because humans can take or reject goodness, not only is the merit of goodness increased, but that merit becomes humans' own."<sup>30)</sup>

"The second class of soul is called the sentient soul. This is possessed by birds and beasts. It allows the birds and beasts to be born, to develop and to grow up, and causes their ears and eyes to be able to hear and see, their mouths and noses to be able to taste and smell, and their limbs and bodies to be aware of things, though not to be able to infer truth."<sup>31)</sup>

Accordingly, Ricci regarded good actions as based on the choice between good and evil. This choice implies free will as the root of good and evil actions. His concept of free will was influenced by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>32)</sup>

Unlike Ricci, Zhu regarded humans' good actions as not based on their will but emerging from their good nature, which is naturally endowed with all morals (Zhu 1.1, 2000). Therefore, Zhu believed that humans can commit good actions by following their good nature, contrary to Ricci's claim that human good and evil actions are based on their will. According to Zhu, animals are also innately endowed with morality, but unlike humans, they possess only one of the morals. Thus,

---

30) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下, 446, 天主賦人此性, 能行二者, 所以厚人類也, 其能取舍此善, 非但增為善之功, 尤俾其功為我功焉; Translated by Lancashire and Fu, 355.

31) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 下, 39, 中品曰: 覺魂, 此能扶所賦者生活長大, 而又使之以耳目視聽, 以口鼻嗅嗅, 以肢體覺物情, 是為禽獸之魂; Translated by Lancashire and Fu, 145.

32) That of Ricci was based on Aquinas, (*Summa Theologica* 2.81, 2555) This was also written in *City of God* written by Augustine. (Augustine13, p.3011) They was influenced by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, translated by Ross, 864-870).

animals can commit only one type of moral action. For example, tigers and wolves show love for their own offspring, bees and ants demonstrate righteousness between ruler and subject, otters perform ancestral rites, and doves exhibit fidelity between male and female.

“Tigers and wolves exhibit motherly love for their babies, bees and ants display a proper relationship characterized by the subjects’ loyalty to their ruler, badgers and otters perform ancestral rites, and ospreys and doves maintain fidelity between male and female. These actions, such as benevolence and righteousness, are performed by animals.”<sup>33)</sup>

According to Zhu, the benevolence and righteousness exhibited by animals are the same as those moral actions committed by humans. Zhu’s claim differs from Ricci’s assertion that animals act only on instinct and not out of morality. Furthermore, Zhu mentioned that humans’ actions are sometimes morally inferior to animals’. Why did he say so? Because the *li*, a source of goodness within the human mind, is influenced by *qi*, which contains a mixture of good and evil. Thus, moral actions based on *li* are influenced by private desires rooted in *qi*. As a result, humans sometimes fail to act morally. However, animals are innately endowed with only one of the moral virtues, allowing them to focus solely on that virtue and consistently perform moral actions.

“Although animals are innately endowed with only one virtue, they are

---

33) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 4.68, 如虎狼之父子, 蜂蟻之君臣, 豺獺之報本, 雉鳩之有別. 曰仁獸, 曰義獸, 是也.

thoroughly endowed with righteousness. Even though humans were originally endowed with all virtues by Heaven, why do they not always commit moral actions due to their desires and endowed qi? [Zhu's Reply] "Animals can commit only one moral action well because they were originally endowed with only one virtue. In contrast, humans, endowed with all virtues, cannot concentrate on them all and therefore do not always perform moral actions well."<sup>34)</sup>

Zhu claimed that animals' actions are sometimes morally superior to humans'. Judging from Ricci's perspective, this is incorrect because animals can only engage in instinctive behavior, not moral actions.

#### IV. Conclusion

According to Matteo Ricci, humans innately possess morality because they were created by the supreme good, the Lord of Heaven, and resemble Him, as stated in *the Bible*. However, they also inherently carry evil due to the inheritance of Adam's original sin. This duality allows humans to choose between good and evil, enabling them to engage in both moral and immoral actions. In contrast, animals, endowed only with instinct by the Lord of Heaven, lack the capacity for moral actions according to Ricci's view.

Zhu Xi, on the other hand, posited that both humans and animals were innately endowed with morality. He attributed this to their crea-

---

34) Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 4.19, 問: “物雖得其一偏, 然徹頭徹尾得義理之正. 人合下具此天命之全體, 乃爲物欲·氣稟所昏, 反不能如物之能通其一處而全盡, 何也?” 曰: “物只有這一處通, 便卻專. 人卻事事理會得些, 便卻泛泛, 所以易昏.”

tion through the movement of *qi* following *li*, which he considered the source of morality, rather than the Lord of Heaven. Humans are innately endowed with all morals, while animals possess only one. Therefore, humans can commit all moral acts, whereas animals can commit only one moral act. For example, tigers and wolves inherently have benevolence, as shown by a mother's love for her babies, and bees and ants inherently have and act on righteousness, as demonstrated by their loyalty to their ruler.

Ricci's view was based on faith in the Lord of Heaven creating all things, while Zhu's view was based on the law of nature, meaning all things are created by the movement of *qi* (氣, material force) following *li* (理 principle).

## Bibliography

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Ross, W.D. Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2017.
- Augustine. *City of God*, in *The Complete Works of St. Augustine*, translated by Philip Schaff. Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2019.
- Back Youngsun. “Are animals moral?: Zhu Xi and Jeong Yakyong’s views on nonhuman animals.” *Asian Philosophy* 28.2, 2018, 97-116.
- Don Baker. “Thomas Aquinas and Chǒng Yakyong: Rebels Within Tradition” *Tasan hak* [Journal of Tasan Studies] 3, 2002, 32-69.
- Jung Hyunsoo. “Cheonju sireui e natanan Matteo Ricci eui inmulseong dongir-on yeonku” (A Study on Whether Human and Animal Natures Are the Same or Different According to Matteo Ricci’s True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), *Inmun gwa yesul* (Humanities and Art)3, 2016, 121-144.
- Le Aiguo (樂愛國). “朱熹論人与物的异同, 貴賤和平等” (Zhu Xi’s View on Difference, Common Point, High, Low and Equality between Humans and Animals, 社會科學戰線, 2017, 13-20.
- Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇). *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), in 耶蘇會文獻匯編, in 中國哲學書電子化計劃, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=804348>, 2006.
- Matteo Ricci. *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義, translated by Lancashire and Hu Kuo-chen, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, in cooperation with The Ricci Institute Taipei, 1985.
- Shujing* 書經 (The Book of Documents), Seoul: Daedong munhwa yeonkuwon at Sungkyunkwan University, 1984.
- The Holy Bible*. Illinois: Crossway Wheaton, Kindle Edition, 2019.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. In *The Complete Works of Thomas Aquinas*, translated by John Henry Parker, Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2018.
- Wang Maohong 王懋竑. Zhu Xi nianpu 朱熹年譜 (Chronology of Zhu Xi’s

Life), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1998.

Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Assorted Sayings of Master Zhu), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1999.

Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (The Complete Works of Zhu Xi), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chupanshe, 2010.

Zhu Xi. *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句 (Annotations on Zhongyong). In *Kyeongseo* 經書 (Confucian Four Books). Seoul: Sungkyunkwan University Press, 1970.

Zhu Xi. *Zhongyong huowen* 中庸或問 (Questions and Answers on Doctrine of Mean). In *Zhuza quanshu* 朱子全書 (The Complete Works of Master Zhu). Shanghai: Shanghai gujichubnshe, 2000.

Zhu Xi, *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句 (Annotations on Zhongyong), translated by Daniel Gardner, Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2007.

Zhu Xi. *Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集註 (Annotations on Mengzhi), Seoul: Sungkyunkwan University Press, 1970.

Zhu Xi. *Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集註 (Annotations on Mengzhi), translated by Daniel Gardner, Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com, 2007.

논문투고일: 2024년 06월 29일

심사개시일: 2024년 07월 16일

게재확정일: 2024년 08월 02일

---

• ABSTRACT •

---

Do Humans and Animals Innately Possess Morality, and Are Animals  
Capable of Moral Actions Like Humans?: A Comparison of Matteo  
Ricci and Zhu Xi

Research Professor Yi Jongwoo  
(HK+ Center in the Institute of Japanese Studies, Dankook University at Jukjeon)

Do both humans and animals innately possess morality? Can animals commit moral actions like humans? These topics have been important across the ages and in all countries. Matteo Ricci criticized Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism on these issues. In this article, I compare their claims in this article. According to Ricci, only humans have been inherently endowed with morality by the supreme good, the Lord of Heaven, but have inherited evil due to the original sin of the first ancestor, Adam. Therefore, they inherently possess both good and evil, have the ability to choose between them, and can thus commit both good and evil acts. In contrast, animals are not endowed with morality but only instinct by the Lord of Heaven; therefore, they cannot commit moral actions. Unlike Ricci, Zhu Xi argued that both humans and animals are inherently endowed with morality because they were created by the movement of *qi* (氣 material force) following the good *li* (理 principle). However, humans possess all morals, whereas animals possess only one because humans' *qi* is perfect, while animals' *qi* is not. Consequently, humans can commit all moral actions, whereas animals can perform only one. For example, tigers and wolves innately have benevolence, which is exemplified by a mother's love for her babies, and bees and ants innately have and act on righteousness, which is demonstrated by their loyalty to their ruler. Therefore, Ricci criticized Zhu's concept of *li* because *li* is inherent within things and thus depends on them, making it incapable of creating all things like the Lord of Heaven. Ricci's view was based on faith in the Lord of Heaven creating all things, while Zhu's view was based on the law of nature, meaning all things are

Do Humans and Animals Innately Possess Morality, and Are Animals Capable of  
Moral Actions Like Humans? | Yi Jongwoo 397

created by the movement of *qi* (氣 material force) following *li* (理 principle).

**Key words:** morality, the Lord of Heaven, *li*, Catholicism, Neo-Confucianism

---