

# The Ethical Obligations of Humankind towards Animals and Its Implications for Korean Religions: Focusing on Korean Buddhism and Daesoon Thought

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JDTREA 2024,3(2): 55–70

## Original Articles

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*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 2024): 55–70

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<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2024.3.2.55>

**Day of submission:** 2024.01.05.

**Completion of review:** 2024.02.10.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2024.03.20.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

## Abstract

This study presents and examines various ethical theories that could offer potential solutions to the issue of discrimination against non-human animals in contemporary society, and traces its implications for Korean religions. The article focuses on two normative ethical theories – virtue ethics and the ethics of care – and through an analysis of existing research, argues that both theories may serve as foundational principles guiding our behavior, not only in our interactions with other humans but also in our treatment of non-human animals. Furthermore, the examples presented in this study demonstrate that similar ethical theories have already been adopted as frameworks for human behavior towards other living beings within two religious traditions, Buddhism and Daesoon Jinrihoe. In both belief systems, animals are acknowledged as integral components of the world in which we live. Additionally, both religions endorse the idea that the well-being of non-human animals and our attitudes toward them can also have a direct impact on our present lives, as well as on our future existence. Consequently, promoting morally upright conduct towards other living creatures should be viewed as a necessary measure, beneficial not only for the animals themselves but also for the collective well-being of humanity.

**Keywords:** virtue ethics; ethics of care; Buddhism; Daesoon Thought; animal welfare; compassion; Buddha-nature; *Haewon Sangsaeng*; *dongmul cheondojae*

## Introduction

Among the various social ethical movements that occurred in the past century, the animal rights movement is unique, not only because it concerns non-human animal welfare but also because it was initiated by academia. The utilitarian analysis of animal welfare proposed by the Australian philosopher captured public attention in the 1970s, starting an ongoing debate on the moral obligations of humans towards animals. In his study, Singer based his anti-speciesist<sup>1</sup> argument on the premise that all non-human animals share an interest in being free from suffering. Therefore, they deserve equal consideration and should not be subjected to any form of exploitation or ill-treatment (Singer, 1975).

A few years after Singer published his book, another philosopher introduced an even more controversial theory, which was based on the premise that animals possess advanced cognitive abilities similar to humans.<sup>2</sup> Based on this, he suggested that animals should be granted equal rights to those of human beings (Regan, 1983). This, in turn, revived the philosophical and religious disputes regarding the ethical obligations of humankind towards non-human animals. Scholars suggest that those obligations can be explained in connection with popular ethical theories, such as virtue ethics and the ethics of care.

The aim of this article is to present and examine various ethical theories as potential approaches to addressing the issue of discrimination against non-human animals in contemporary society and to explore its implications for Korean religions. This study will specifically focus on two types of normative ethical theories – virtue ethics and the ethics of care – which serve as foundational principles guiding our behavioral norms not only towards other humans but also towards non-human animals. The doctrinal and practical examples implemented in this study will illustrate that theories based on similar principles have already been introduced as measures of human behavior towards other living creatures in religions like Buddhism and Daesoon Jinrihoe (대순진리회/大巡眞理會, The Fellowship of Daesoon Truth).

## Virtue Ethics and Ethics of Care

Virtue ethics is a form of normative philosophy primarily developed in the West by ancient Greeks. Although many famous Western philosophers have devised different forms of virtue ethics, the one proposed by Aristotle (384–322 BCE) continues to be the most influential. In his agent-centered theory, which focuses on individuals and their characters rather than singular actions, Aristotle refers to virtues as character traits or psychological dispositions deeply embedded in every person. These dispositions help us behave appropriately in certain situations by encouraging proper responses in accordance with reason (Dimmock and Fisher 2017, 52). Thereby, virtues also play a crucial role in defining our character and shaping who we are. Consequently, it

becomes particularly important to consistently cultivate and develop the skill of virtue, not merely through intellectual teaching or single actions, but through continuous improvement, practical learning, and habitual conduct (Dimmock and Fisher 2017, 53–54). This will lead us to “*eudaimonia*,”<sup>3</sup> which according to Aristotle, is the state we experience once we fully achieve a good, happy life. *Eudaimonia* is also the ultimate aim and end of human existence (Dimmock and Fisher 2017, 51).

To properly learn from others, particularly those who are more “morally skilled in practicing virtue,” and to recognize, for instance, what is morally good or bad, or how to respond courageously or compassionately in specific situations, we must also cultivate what Aristotle referred to as practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Only a person who possessed that practical wisdom can act in a rational manner and translate their psychological dispositions or character traits into practical behavior. In other words, “practical wisdom supports our instinctive knowledge of how to respond virtuously to various feelings, emotions, and situations” (Dimmock and Fisher, 2017, 55). Hence, only an individual who is practically wise and morally mature can understand what is worthwhile, important, and advantageous in life (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2018). In this context, virtue ethics not only helps humans to understand what it means to be a virtuous person but also teaches us how practicing virtuous habits. This enables us to make the right choices when confronted with ethical dilemmas.

A truly virtuous person also develops characteristics such as goodness, friendliness, compassion, and sensitivity, which inherently impact not only their own life but, most importantly, the lives of others. In this sense, the journey towards a *eudaimon* life will exert an influence on the lives of other beings, including non-human animals.<sup>4</sup> Mostly because it is challenging to believe that genuinely virtuous person would remain indifferent to the suffering of others, even animals. As noted by Fröding and Peterson (2011), virtue ethics prohibits us from neglecting the interests of others, particularly those beings with whom we have formed some bonds, such as pet animals.<sup>5</sup> This approach, also one of the characteristics of a sentimentalist virtue ethics, allows us to experience more empathy for those close to us rather than distant others or strangers.

Sentimentalist virtue ethics, as advocated by David Hume (1711–1776), places a strong emphasis on human connection, particularly on benevolence and sympathy and/or empathy toward others. According to this notion, we are capable of understanding our moral dispositions and distinguish between what is morally right or wrong by relying on our feelings toward others (Slote 2013, 25–26). Our capacity for empathy, encompassing the ability to feel the pain, joy, and other such states of others, is not only crucial to human altruism but also serves as explanation for our moral judgments. It provides a more vivid understanding of our actions toward other beings than any other form of virtue-ethical rationalism. In this context, it becomes clear why our moral judgments and behaviors towards family, friends, or those we know are characterized by greater empathy compared to people’s actions towards strangers. Simultaneously, humans tend to feel more empathy and exhibit a greater willingness

to help someone whose danger or suffering they have witnessed, as opposed to cases wherein they are unaware of the danger or suffering of others (Slote 2013, 25). Nevertheless, both Aristotelian and sentimentalist virtue ethics do not permit indifference to the misfortune and suffering of other beings, including non-human animals. Simultaneously, these perspectives highlight the principle that humans should refrain from causing harm to others and, when necessary, take care of them. This makes it similar with the viewpoint advocated by care ethicists.

Brite Wrage (2022, 2) defines the ethics of care as an ethical framework asserting that care, interpreted as the intentional meeting of others' needs, is central to morality. Within this framework, emotions such as empathy and sympathy play a crucial role in moral motivation; our emotional connection with others makes us to care for them. In this context, empathy, rather than reason, is acknowledged as a wellspring of morality. Furthermore, the intentional meeting of the needs of others extends not only to humans but also to non-human animals. There are situations in which many of these creatures depend on humans and require our care to survive, develop, and achieve basic well-being.

In his article on animal welfare, Daniel Engster (2006, 525) pointed out that, "since all human beings depend upon the care of others for our survival and basic functioning and at least implicitly claim that capable individuals should care for individuals in need when they can do so, we must logically recognize as morally valid the claims that others make upon us for care when they need it, and should endeavor to provide care to them when we are capable of doing so without significant danger to ourselves, seriously compromising our long-term well-being or undermining our ability to care for other individuals who depend upon us."

Within the above context, the "principle of consistent dependency" argument may not always directly apply to human-animal relations, especially in the case of wild animals whose survival and well-being are not always dependent on human care, in the same ways as humans, too, do not necessarily rely on animals for their survival and development, the situation changes when humans take actions that make animals dependent upon them. In other words, when humans actively establish a relationship of dependency with animals – such as adopting a pet, using animals for clinical research, or exploiting the natural environment, causing damage to wildlife – they have moral obligations to care for the well-being of each of them (Engster 2006, 526–527). Furthermore, some care ethicists argue that concern should extend not only to animals with which humans share a relationship or those whose well-being is threatened by our actions but also to all non-human creatures capable of experiencing suffering the same way humans do. Because this is what makes a human a genuinely caring and compassionate person (Animal Ethics 2023). In the end, tending to the well-being of non-human animals not only has moral implications but also directly impacts our physical live. Every creature plays a vital role in the ecosystem humans inhabit, and it is human society's responsibility to care for that ecosystem. Thus, fulfilling

humankind's moral obligations towards animals should be approached in similar terms. In Korea, religious traditions such as Buddhism and Daeseon Jinrihoe actively promote the well-being of non-human animals, addressing both physical and metaphysical aspects. The following section will explore this issue in detail.

## Korean Buddhism and Animal Welfare

One of the numerous social and cultural changes that occurred in Korea, driven by rapid modernization and economic growth in the latter part of the 20th century, was the change in the attitudes and perceptions toward non-human animals, particularly pet animals. The emergence of the animal protection movement in the early 1980s, along with the increasing criticism against the consumption of dog meat<sup>6</sup> and the enactment of the first *Animal Protection Act* in 1992, all serve as illustrative examples of those changing attitudes. These are further underscored by the surge in popularity of pet animals, beginning in the early 2000s, and the continuous growth of the “pet industry.” Additionally, as emphasized by Kim Seok-eun (2020), a few years ago, Korea entered into the so-called “era of the personification of pets.”<sup>7</sup> This signifies that Koreans no longer perceive pets, especially dogs and cats, as mere “objects,” but rather as integral members of their families deserving protection similar to any other family member.

All the above-mentioned recent developments in animal welfare, combined with the increasing fascination with pets and the evolving perception of them, serve as good examples of the formation of virtuous habits and care ethics toward animals in Korean society. However, examples of fulfilling moral obligations and practicing care toward non-human animals can also be found in various religious traditions long known to Koreans. Buddhism is one of them.

It is well known that among five Buddhist precepts (*ogye*, 오계/五戒), the first one – the precept of *ahiṃsā* (*bulsalsaeng*, 불살생/不殺生), typically translated into English as “non-injury” or “nonviolence” – generally refers to abstaining from killing. This precept teaches the sanctity of all life and thus applies to our actions not only toward other humans but also toward all living beings, including animals. As Finnigan (2017, 3) has pointed out, the Buddha considered animals to have moral significance, and consequently, he taught his disciples to avoid any occupations that involve the killing of animals. He also prohibited any behavior that intentionally causes harm to animals and even encouraged people to help animals wherever possible, including rescuing them and setting them free.

All the aforementioned actions are connected to another Buddhist virtue, that of compassion, known as *karuṇā* (*jabi*, 자비/慈悲). Early Buddhist scripture collections, such as the *Majjhima Nikāya*, define compassion as an altruistic attitude that strives for the welfare of others out of empathetic concern, seeking to deliver them from suffering (Finnigan 2017, 6). Compassion is a central virtue in Mahāyāna Buddhist

teachings, where it is presented as one of the most important characteristics of great bodhisattvas, like Avalokiteśvara (*Gwanseeum bosal*, 관세음보살 / 觀世音菩薩) or Kṣitigarbha (*Jijang bosal*, 지장보살 / 地藏菩薩). However, compassion, understood as a practical attitude of avoiding harm and assisting living beings in need, is not exclusive to bodhisattvas; it applies to all followers of the Buddhism. It is important; however, to understand the meaning of being a truly compassionate person in Buddhist terms.

According to the Buddha's teaching, a truly compassionate person refrains from harming or killing others, including animals, out of genuine concern for their well-being, whereas a selfish person engages in such actions with the belief that it would somehow benefit themselves, perhaps by accommodating good *karma* (Finnigan 2017, 7). In other words, not only actions but also motivations matter. Therefore, embodying compassion in Buddhist terms requires a profound understanding of the virtue of compassion and acting accordingly in every situation. However, nowadays many Buddhist followers find it difficult to fully understand this concept. Before this problem is explored further, two other doctrinal arguments against the mistreatment of non-human animals can be presented as these are often invoked by Korean Buddhist monastics in their discourse on animal welfare and ecology.

The first argument relates to the idea of Buddha-nature, usually referred to in Sanskrit as *tathāgatagarbha* (*yeoraejang*, 여래장/如來藏, "the womb of the Thus-Come-One"), or *buddhadhātu* (*bulseong*, 불성/佛性, "buddha-nature").<sup>8</sup> The notion was introduced in India along with the scripture titled *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (*Yeoraejanggyeong*, 여래장경/如來藏經). The sutra preaches:

Sons of good family, just as these unsightly, putrid, disgusting and no [longer] pleasing lotuses, supernaturally created by the Tathāgata, and the pleasing and beautiful form of a tathāgata sitting cross-legged in [each of] the calyxes of these lotuses, emitting hundreds of thousands of rays of light, [are such that when they are] recognized by gods and humans, [these latter] then pay homage and also show reverence [to them], in the same way, sons of good family, also the Tathāgata, the Honorable One and Perfectly Awakened One, [perceives] with his insight, knowledge and tathāgata-vision that all the various sentient beings are encased in myriads of defilements, [such as] desire, anger, misguidedness, longing and ignorance.

And, sons of good family, [he] perceives that inside sentient beings encased in defilements sit many tathāgatas, cross-legged and motionless, endowed like myself with a [tathāgata's] knowledge and vision. And [the Tathāgata], having perceived inside those [sentient beings] defiled by all defilements the true nature of a tathāgata (*tathāgatadharmatā*) motionless and unaffected by any of the states of existence, then says: "Those tathāgatas are just like me!"

Sons of good family, in this way a tathāgata’s vision is admirable, [because] with it [he] perceives that all sentient beings contain a tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*). (Zimmerman 2002, 102–105)<sup>9</sup>

The verses above clearly state that all sentient beings, despite being stained with a countless number of defilements, share the same innate potential – “unaffected by any of the states of existence” – a fundamental nature that they share with the Buddha. This potential enables them to attain enlightenment. Therefore, harming or killing other creatures that share the potential of becoming a Buddha is considered unacceptable from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine (Finnigan 2017, 9). It also significantly affects our karma, and consequently, our future existence.

The second argument refers to the Buddhist law of dependent origination, *pratīyasamutpāda* (*yeongi*, 연기/緣起), which asserts that all entities arise and exist interdependently. If all entities arise and exist relationally, and they cannot exist without each other, all of them must be seen in equal terms. Therefore, all beings should be respected and treated with the same empathy and compassion. What is crucial here; however, is to understand compassion not simply in terms of providing physical or psychological well-being to others but also in metaphysical terms. By practicing compassionate behavior toward others, people can provide them with an opportunity to be free from the ignorance and suffering of this world, guiding them toward enlightenment (Lim and Lee 2021, 184). The Buddhist ritual of releasing animals (*bangsaengjae*, 방생재/放生齋) and ritual of sending the souls of animals to the otherworld (*dongmul cheondojae*, 동물 천도재/動物薦度齋) serve as good examples of practicing the virtues of compassion and care toward animals on both mundane and metaphysical levels. Furthermore, both rituals also have positive effects on the lives of the Buddhists who practice them.

The first from the previously-mentioned Buddhist ceremonies focuses on releasing captive animals into their natural habitat,<sup>10</sup> which is understood as a means of cultivating compassion toward other living creatures. However, by doing this, practitioners not only providing the animals with better living conditions, but also with the possibility of taking refuge in Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). It is believed that this, eventually, might help them in attaining enlightenment in the next life (Lim and Lee 2021, 184). Moreover, according to the Buddhist doctrine, the ritual itself also affects the lives of people who participate in it – by showing compassion to other living creatures, the practitioners of the ritual not only perfect themselves but also accumulate good *karma*, which will eventually positively affect their future existence. Also, if the ritual is perceived from the point of view of the notion of the dependent origination of all sentient beings, by bringing back animals to their natural environment, devotees are also improving the ecosystem, and by this by doing so, their own living conditions. In other words, by taking care of others, people also take care of themselves, and gain a chance to improve their own existence, both in this world and the future one.



However, some scholars have already pointed out<sup>11</sup> that today, many Buddhist practitioners struggle with a proper understanding of the true meaning of compassion and, therefore, the genuine meaning and purpose of the ritual of releasing animals. For example, an increasing number of Buddhists nowadays decide to perform the ritual motivated solely by self-interest and a desire to accumulate good deeds in this life. This situation has led to the commercialization of the ritual, and with the constantly growing demand for the animals to be released, many practitioners simply buy animals that were previously caught, specifically for that ceremonial purpose (Shiu and Stokes 2008, 188). Moreover, many of those animals are released thoughtlessly and end up in an environment that is not suitable for them. This might not only lead to their death but also to the destruction of other species and their natural habitat, causing problems in the ecosystem (Jung 2020, 152). In this sense, the practice of the ritual of releasing animals has nothing to do with animal welfare, as well as the practice of the virtue of compassion and care toward non-human animals, as understood in Buddhist terms. This is not the case with other Buddhist ritual of sending off the souls of dead animals to the otherworld.

While the ritual of releasing animals was introduced in Korea during the Three Kingdom Period (57 BCE–668 CE) (Lim and Lee 2021, 181), the Buddhist ritual of sending the souls of animals to the otherworld first appeared in Korea around year 2000<sup>12</sup> as a response of the Buddhist community to the needs of time; precisely the aforementioned changing attitudes of the Korean people toward non-human animals.<sup>13</sup> The ritual quickly gained popularity, which resulted in an increased number of temples that have started to offer *dongmul cheondojae* to anyone wishing to send the soul of their beloved companion to the otherworld. Today, many Korean Buddhist temples still offer rituals for companion animals, as well as conduct rituals for so called “road-kill animals,” animal victims of human violence and abuse, and even wild animals and plants that have fallen victims to the modernization and environmental degradation.

One of the main purposes of the Buddhist *cheondojae* is to appease the soul of the deceased person and secure its rebirth in one of the three benevolent realms of existence – the world of gods, demigods, or humans. Therefore, by performing *dongmul cheondojae*, Buddhists can not only fulfill their moral obligation towards their pet companions but also help them achieve a better future life. Moreover, by conducting the ritual, they can practice compassion and care toward all sentient beings and through this practice cultivate and improve ourselves morally. Additionally, conducting a ceremony for the souls of wild animals and plants allows them to raise awareness about the critical need for the protection of the natural environment, which is gradually being degraded by human activities. Lastly, performing the ritual is seen as helping them accumulate good *karma*, which can be advantageous for their own future reincarnations.

## Daesoon Thought and Animal Welfare

In the previous section, Buddhists position and doctrinal arguments regarding animal welfare were briefly outlined and some examples of Buddhist ritual practices, which should be regarded as living expression of ethical virtues towards non-human animals, were introduced. In this section, the problem of the ethical obligations of humankind towards animals from the perspective of Daesoon Jinrihoe's system of thought will be examined.

According to the Daesoon Thought, all things in the universe originated from the Supreme God – Sangje (상제/上帝),<sup>14</sup> and therefore are organically interrelated (Joo 2020, 303). In other words, Daesoon Jinrihoe followers perceive the universe as a one whole, constituted of smaller components – different kinds of beings connected through dynamic mutual relations (Kim and Lee 2021, 250). In this context, all sentient beings are not only important parts of one, larger “organism,” but at the same time, all of them have the same right to liberation in accordance with the Daesoon Jinrihoe's principle of the Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence (*baewon sangsaeng*, 해원상생/解冤相生).<sup>15</sup> This notion is emphasized in chapter two of Acts from *The Canonical Scripture* (*Jeongyeong*, 전경/典經, 2020).

Sangje, who had been finishing the Holy Work of Great Court Temple (Daewon-sa), changed His clothes and went out of the room. When He stepped outdoors, many varieties of birds and species of animals gathered together quite suddenly in the valley around the temple. They greeted Him as if they were begging Him for something. Sangje looked around the group of birds and animals with interest and said to them: “Do you also wish for the resolution of grievances for the Latter World?” In reply, the animals bowed to Him as if they understood. When Sangje told them, “I see. Now step aside.” The multitude of animals followed His order. (*Acts 2: 15*)

This verse clearly indicates that Sangje himself included non-human animals in his plan of creating a new, better world, and accordingly, they had become a subject of the Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence. In other words, all the animals had become a part of the system that is based on correlation and mutual reciprocity between animals and humans. This makes the principle of Mutual Beneficence – *sangsaeng*, similar to the principle of consistent dependency in care ethics. Furthermore, emotions, viewed as the roots of various kinds of relationships, also play an essential role in this principle,<sup>15</sup> as do virtues and practical wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear how precisely the *baewon sangsaeng* principle should be applied to animals; how and to what extent humans are obliged to help them, and to what extent do they need or are dependent on such help? What can be taken for granted; however, is that all the misfortune of animals, and consequently, their grudges and grievances, stem from human activities and attempts to subjugate the natural environment over the

centuries. Therefore, since all the grudges and grievances of the animals originate in human's actions, it seems obvious that it is our moral obligation to free them from it (Kim and Lee 2021, 250–251). As Cha Seon-keun (2020, 320) has pointed out, this can be achieved by implementing and practicing the principle of Mutual Beneficence. At the same time, caution should be taken not to provoke or directly cause new grievances, not only toward animals, but also to any other creatures, and even plants which, as aforementioned, are also an inseparable part of the universe.

Daesoon Jinrihoe's doctrine states that the Later World (*bucbeon*, 후천/後天),<sup>17</sup> distinguished by harmony and Mutual Beneficence, can be attained through the Resolution of Grievances of all creations, not only humans. In other words, if the attainment of the ideal earthly paradise is desired, this world, or to name it in terms of Daesoon Thought – the Former World (*seoncheon*, 선천/先天), characterized by chaos and conflicts, must undergo a complete transformation. The transformation will become possible only when all Mutual Contention, grudges and grievances of all beings disappear. In this context, only by adopting a caring attitude toward non-human animals and engaging in morally conducted actions that benefit them, such as improving their existence and thereby addressing their grievances and grudges, can the achievement of the Later World be entertained as a hope. Therefore, promoting and fulfilling ethical conduct toward animals, taking care of them on both physical and psychological levels, is not only important from the ecological point of view. From the perspective of Daesoon Jinrihoe's doctrine, it is a necessary means that will also directly benefit the whole humankind in the future.

## Conclusion

Among many different approaches in animal welfare debate, the argument based on moral sentiments of compassion, sympathy, and care for animals as both sentient beings and essential element of our ecosystem, as well as human comfort in many areas of life, seems to preside over different ideas. It is in human nature to take care of others, especially those with whom one shares intimate bonds or whose suffering one witnesses. Nevertheless, a truly virtuous and caring person also would not remain indifferent to the misfortune of any other being, including animal. The two examples of religious traditions presented in this article also follow this notion.

Although both Buddhism and Daesoon Jinrihoe recognize the idea of the dominion of humankind over animals, at the same time, both traditions provide their believers with practices through which they can develop morality toward non-human beings. This is crucial from the perspective of the doctrine of both systems because they acknowledge animals as an integral part of the world where humans live. Both traditions follow the notion that the welfare of non-human animals and humankind's attitude towards them may directly affect, both positively and negatively, not only one's present but also one's future life. In this sense, both religious traditions also provide

their followers with a broader concept of a good, happy life that goes beyond the this-worldly concept of *eudaimonia* introduced by the Greeks. Therefore, promoting right moral conduct toward other living creatures should be considered as a necessary measure not only for their benefit but also for the benefit of the whole world and humanity.

## Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term “speciesism” was introduced by the English philosopher Richard Ryder in the 1970s and popularized by Peter Singer. It refers to the practice of treating members of one species, specifically humans, as morally superior to other species. Supporters of speciesism argue that certain attributes, such as moral agency, autonomy, rationality, intelligence, and language use, are unique to humans and justify treating them as morally more important than animals (Duignan 2013).
- <sup>2</sup> This statement was later confirmed by scholars of cognitive ethology, who provided empirical evidence for animal cognition and communication (Fröding and Peterson 2011, 63-64).
- <sup>3</sup> *Eudaimonia* is one of the key concepts in ancient Greek moral philosophy. It is usually translated as “happiness” or “flourishing,” and sometimes as “well-being.” In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that living in accordance with virtues is necessary for *eudaimonia* (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2018).
- <sup>4</sup> Even though, Aristotle himself excluded animals from his virtue ethics theory as soulless and inferior to human beings.
- <sup>5</sup> Fröding and Peterson (2011, 50, 67) suggest that there is a morally significant distinction to be drawn between animals who are our friends and those who are not. From the point of view of Aristotle’s ethical theory, friendship is based on three main virtuous qualities – excellence, pleasantness, and usefulness, which translate into three types of friendships: friendship based on mutual admiration, the one based on mutual pleasure, and friendship based on mutual advantage. When we befriend an animal, we have moral obligations toward them that arise from our friendship, because we admire, take pleasure, or benefit from each other’s company. However, we do not usually develop this kind of obligation toward animals that we do not consider as friends.
- <sup>6</sup> The first Korean Animal Protection Society was established in 1991 (Veldkamp 2008, 165).
- <sup>7</sup> Among the different causes of this situation, Kim points out socio-cultural changes, such as Korea’s rapid economic growth, the emergence of single-person households, aging of society, and a low birth rate. In addition, he believes that the era of personification of pet animals starts when the country’s per capita national income exceeds 30,000 USD, and Korea already reached that number in 2018 (Kim 2020, 660).
- <sup>8</sup> The second term, buddhadhātu, appears to be prevalent in Korean and other East Asian Buddhist traditions.
- <sup>9</sup> For the full English translation of *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, see Zimmerman 2002, 94-161.
- <sup>10</sup> The exact origin of the ritual is not clear. The earliest description of the ceremony can be found in the Daoist text *Liezi*. This suggests that since the arrival of Buddhism in China, the cultural practice of animal release, which resonates well with the notions of compassion and nonviolence, has been given a

Buddhist meaning. Subsequently, Chinese Buddhists produced apocryphal texts to justify such a practice as their own (Shiu and Stokes 2008, 182-184).

<sup>11</sup> See Lim and Lee (2021), Shiu and Stokes (2008), and Jung (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Located in Gangwon Province, Hyundeok Temple (현덕사/賢德寺) was among the Korean Buddhist temples that initiated the tradition of dongmul cheondojae. The ritual has been taking place there every year since 2002 (Hyundeok Temple Site).

<sup>13</sup> The author of the article was able to confirm this statement through an interview with a monk at Yaksu Temple (약수사/藥水寺), located in Gwanak District in Seoul. The interview was conducted on October 1, 2021. During the interview, the monk was asked about the reasons behind the emergence of *dongmul cheondojae*. He linked his answer to recent demographical changes in Korean society and the increasing number of Koreans who own pets, stating, "In the past, Koreans didn't think of animals as a part of their families, but now they do. For them, they are part of their family, like any other member."

<sup>14</sup> Sangje not only presides over all beings but also possessed the power to transform the universe according to his will. As Cha Seon-keun (2020, 305-306) has pointed out, The Supreme God Kang Jeungsan (상제 강증산/上帝 姜甞山, 1871–1909), has already designed the transformation of the universe through the act of Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (*cheonji gongsa*, 천지공사/天地公事), which has been later continued by his successors Doju Jo Jeongsan (도주 조정산/道主 趙鼎山, 1895–1958) and Dojeon Park Wudang (도전 박우당/都典 朴牛堂, 1917–1996). Based on that, Daesoon Jinirihoe's practitioners believe that only the Supreme God Kang and his successors possessed the ability to change the nature, and human beings should conform to this rule.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Gyung-won (1998, 549) has described the concept of *sangsaeng* as a state of peaceful coexistence founded on understanding, enriched with all the fundamental emotions typical of a relationship, such as missing and cherishing each other.

<sup>16</sup> As Joo So-yeon and Ko Nam-sik (2023) have demonstrated, virtues are essential traits for achieving the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence. Therefore, we should consistently practice and cultivate them. However, in doing so, we cannot solely rely on our feelings. We must understand the underlying reasons behind the grievances and grudges of others. To achieve this understanding, something that Aristotle would refer to as practical wisdom is required.

<sup>17</sup> The phrase 'later world' refers to a future ideal world. This idea is present not only in Daesoon thought but in numerous new religious movements that originated in Korea.

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