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Animals and Animal Metaphors in *Huainanzi*

The important philosophical work *Huainanzi* 淮南子,¹ as is well known, was compiled under the patronage of, and with the active participation of, Liu An 劉安, king of Huainan and grandson of the founder of the Han dynasty. The completed work was presented to the newly enthroned emperor Liu Che 劉徹 (posthumously known as Wu Di 武帝, r. 141–87 BC), Liu An's cousin, in 139 BC. The *Huainanzi* draws heavily, through acknowledged and unacknowledged direct quotation as well as paraphrase and allusion, on a wide range of sources, including such received texts as *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Zuozhuan*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Yijing*, *Shijing*, and *Shanhaijing*. It is highly likely that other portions of the text derive from works that were extant during the Han period but are now lost and unknown.² The originality of the text comes from its selection and arrangement of material and from a substantial (but not precisely identifiable) amount of original writing. Liu An and his court scholars tried consciously to avoid having their work be identified with any one or another of the various recognized tendencies of philosophy and political theory of the time. Their aim was to compile a work that would present to its imperial reader a digest of important information about the world and an introduction to the best theories and practices for effective government, regardless of prior intellectual tradition or affiliation.

As with other texts to which it is closely comparable (especially *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Guanzi*), *Huainanzi*'s authors employed a variety of techniques to advance its arguments, including reasoning from first principles and from historical examples.³ Of these rhetorical tech-

¹ All translations from *Huainanzi* (hereafter, *HNZ*) are from John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, trans. and eds., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China, by Liu An, King of Huainan* (New York: Columbia U.P., forthcoming, 2009); they reflect the prepublication draft and may differ slightly from the same translations in the published book.

² An example of this is found in *HNZ* 3, where a section on the movements of the five planets is copied verbatim from a hitherto-unknown text, now entitled *Wuxingzhan* 五星占 ("Stations of the Five Planets") recovered from Tomb 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha, in 1972.

³ *Huainanzi* was a work of multiple authorship, which may explain at least in part the differences in political/philosophical orientation and rhetorical strategies that can be seen between and among its chapters. The commentator Gao You 高誘, in his preface to the *Huai-*

niques, one of the most conspicuous is metaphor. Certain categories of things appear over and over again in the text to make metaphorical points, usually about human behavior. These categories include music (for example the tuning and playing of stringed instruments such as the *qin* 琴 and *se* 瑟); the skill or “knack” of craftsmen; tools (especially carpenters’ tools such as compasses, squares, and marking-cords); the characteristics and behavior of various kinds of animals; and horsemanship and charioteering (which could be considered a subcategory of both skill metaphors and animal metaphors). This paper will concern itself with animal metaphors, as a way of looking into the question of how much, and what kind, of information Han people possessed about the animal world, and how they thought about animals. The text of *Huainanzi* is especially interesting in this respect, because it is the closest thing we have to a digest of what a well-educated person in the early- to mid-Western Han era would be expected to know.

The very large number of animal references is interesting in itself, the more so because early Chinese knowledge of and attitudes toward animals have not been very much studied to date.⁴ *Huainanzi* contains dozens of passages that mention animals, of types ranging from crabs and mollusks to many kinds of mammals, especially many species of carnivores. There are too many such references to permit comprehensive treatment in a short paper, but if one looks at a large representative sample it becomes apparent that they can be arranged to give a coherent account of *Huainanzi*’s understanding of the nature and behavior of animals.

A NOTION OF SPECIES

The *Huainanzi*’s authors were personally familiar with a wide range of domesticated and wild animals and had access to a fund of animal lore such that they were able to write knowledgeably about animals

nanzhi, names eight individuals as contributors to the text; it is not known which chapters may be ascribed to which authors. For more on the circumstances of the *Huainanzi*’s authorship, see Harold D. Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu*, Association for Asian Studies Monograph 46 (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1992), chap. 1.

⁴ The best review of the subject in English is Roel Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 2002). Michael Loewe’s well-known essay “Man and Beast: The Hybrid in Early Chinese Art and Literature” (in Loewe, *Divination, Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 48, Cambridge U.P., 1994, pp. 38–54) deals mainly with the fanciful hybrids and terata with which ancient China imaginatively populated the spirit world and the far-flung fringes of the inhabitable earth. More conventional creatures presumably will be featured in the volume on zoology in Joseph Needham’s ongoing *Science and Civilisation in China*, said to be in preparation. A valuable

and propound theories about their nature and behavior. They expected their audience to be familiar with both wild and domestic animals.⁵ Taking large to medium-sized carnivores as an example, readers were expected to know something about the appearance, habits, and general characteristics of the tiger and the leopard; the black bear and the brown bear; the wolf, dog, fox, dhole, and raccoon-dog (or *tanuki*); and the badger and otter. References to other classes of animals in the text show a similar range of species. That the authors expected their readers to be able to identify a sizeable number of animals is implied by a derisory reference to people who cannot tell a fox from a *tanuki*:

Now if you were to call a fox a raccoon-dog,⁶ it is certain that you do not know what a fox is nor do you know what a raccoon-dog is. If it is not that you have never seen a fox then surely you have never seen a raccoon-dog. A fox and a raccoon-dog do not differ as they belong to the same class of animals. But if you call a fox a raccoon-dog, you do not know either the fox or the raccoon-dog.⁷

The larger point of this passage is to emphasize the importance, for Han thinkers, of making correct categorical distinctions. Things might be superficially similar but still belong to a different category; they might belong to the same category but a different subcategory. Such distinctions were of the essence in using the prevailing theory of correlative cosmology in seeking to understand natural phenomena. But the point carries only on the assumption that readers will be aware of both the similarities and differences between foxes and raccoon-dogs. In this case, both are in the category of carnivores, but are of differ-

source for the identification of animals mentioned in early Chinese sources is Guo Fu 郭郛, *Zhongguo gudai dongwuxue shi* 中國古代動物學史 (Beijing: Science Press, 1999).

⁵ Given the relatively low human population density in China during Han times, wild animals would have been far more abundant there than they have been in recent centuries, and people would have been familiar with them in a variety of contexts – common people would have known wild herbivores as competitors with livestock for grazing land and wild carnivores as potential predators on domestic animals; members of the elite would have known wild animals as prey for hunting and as captive specimens in zoos and hunting-parks, among other things. On wildlife in premodern China, see Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2004).

⁶ The *li* 狸 is *Nyctereutes procyonoides*, commonly known in English as the “raccoon-dog,” also known by its Japanese name, *tanuki*. It is small fox-like carnivore with fur markings similar to those of a raccoon.

⁷ *HNZ* 10.14; 10/83/15–16. References to quoted passages in all instances are first to chapter and section in Major, Queen, Meyer, and Roth, *The Huainanzi* (forthcoming). After the semicolon are the chapter/page/lines in D. C. Lau, ed., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引 (*A Concordance to the Huainanzi*; The ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series; Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992).

ent species. Only someone who knows nothing about animals would confuse the two.

The references to animals in the text show many instances of acute observations of behavior:

THAT BIRDS AND BEASTS DO NOT GATHER IN THE SAME PLACE
IS BECAUSE THEY BELONG TO DIFFERENT SPECIES.

THAT TIGERS AND DEER DO NOT TRAVEL TOGETHER IS BECAUSE
THEIR STRENGTH IS UNEQUAL.⁸

Zengzi said: “When you strike (the side of) a boat in the water,
THE BIRDS HEAR IT AND FLY HIGH,
THE FISH HEAR IT AND PLUNGE DEEP.”

Wherever each tends is different, yet each attains what is suitable to it.⁹

On the other hand some observations are incorrect, and as one would expect this is especially true with regard to large animals rarely encountered in the wild.¹⁰ For example, a statement in Chapter 17 says that “tigers and leopards cannot be made to climb trees”¹¹ – which is only half true; tigers do not climb trees but leopards often do. And a passage in Chapter 16 seems to show a mistaken belief that elephants shed their tusks as deer shed their antlers: “If an elephant loses its tusks it does not begrudge the person who profits from them.”¹²

But, for the most part, in *Huainanzi* observations of animal behavior are fairly on target. One example notes the effects of maternal instinct:

A NURSING BITCH WILL BITE A TIGER,
A BROODING HEN WILL PECK A FOX.

When their [maternal] concern has been aroused, they do not take account of [relative] strengths.¹³

⁸ *HNZ* 9.18; 9/72/13–14. *HNZ* contains many instances of parallel prose, which for a Han reader would probably have served to amplify rhetorically the point of the passage concerned. In this article, parallel prose is identified by being small-caps, indented and set line-for-line. This aspect of *HNZ* is also apparent in the article by Sarah Queen in this issue of *Asia Major*.

⁹ *HNZ* 11.18; 11/103/9–10.

¹⁰ Large mammals such as elephants, rhinos, and tigers were kept in imperial zoos and hunting-parks, and could be found in the wild in southern China during Han times, so some members of the elite may have seen them in the flesh; nevertheless, few Han intellectuals would have had the opportunity to observe their behavior on a sustained basis.

¹¹ *HNZ* 17.93; 17/174/30.

¹² *HNZ* 16.107; 16/164/1. Elephants’ tusks are modified teeth, and as such are permanently implanted in the animals’ skulls rather than shed periodically like the antlers of deer. Harvesting ivory thus involves killing elephants, which presumably they would indeed begrudge.

¹³ *HNZ* 17.64; 17/172/30.

Another passage shows striking first-hand observation of a predator's hunting behavior:

When the fox wants to catch a pheasant, it must first prostrate its body and lower its ears and wait for [the pheasant] to come. The pheasant sees this and believes it (i.e., that the fox is not interested), thus it can be attained and captured. If the fox were to widen its eyes and stare directly [at the pheasant], manifesting its lethal inclination, the pheasant would know to be alarmed and fly far off, thus escaping [the fox's] wrath.¹⁴

As these examples indicate, animals were understood to belong to separate kinds – what today we would call species – with their own characteristic dispositions and behaviors, and those dispositions and behaviors were in many cases well known among Han intellectuals.

COSMOLOGICAL DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation is understood to be an emergent property of the Way (*dao* 道); everything belongs to its own kind (*lei* 類) and has its own nature (*xing* 性). The cosmology of *Huainanzi* (see, for example, the opening passages of Chapters 1 and 3) posits an initial state of undifferentiated *qi* 氣 that gradually divides, through the force of the Way as manifested in the actions of yin and yang, into the phenomenal world as we know it, the world of the “ten thousand things.” An aspect of that differentiation is that animals belong to fixed species, with their own characteristics and habits:

Cavernous and undifferentiated Heaven and Earth, chaotic and inchoate Uncarved Block, not yet created and fashioned into things: This we call the “Grand One.” Together emerging from this unity, so that each acquired its distinctive qualities, there were birds, there were fish, there were animals: This we call “The Differentiation of Things.”¹⁵

BIRDS BEAT THEIR WINGS IN THE AIR IN ORDER TO FLY.
WILD BEASTS STOMP ON SOLID GROUND IN ORDER TO RUN.
SERPENTS AND DRAGONS LIVE IN THE WATER.
TIGERS AND LEOPARDS LIVE IN CAVES.

This is the nature of Heaven and Earth... .

ALL THINGS ATTAIN WHAT IS SUITABLE TO THEM;
THINGS ACCORD WITH THEIR NICHES.¹⁶

¹⁴ *HNZ* 18.27; 18/202/5-7. ¹⁵ *HNZ* 14.1; 14/132/10-11. ¹⁶ *HNZ* 1.7; 1/3/15-16, 21.

Animals behave in ways appropriate to their form and physical qualities:

THE MOVEMENT OF ARMORED BUGS (E.G., MOLLUSKS, TURTLES)
FACILITATES RIGIDITY;

THE MOVEMENT OF VIRGIN BUGS (E.G., BEES AND WASPS)¹⁷
FACILITATES POISONOUS STINGING.

THE MOVEMENT OF BLACK AND BROWN BEARS FACILITATES
SEIZING AND GRASPING;

THE MOVEMENT OF RHINOS AND OXEN FACILITATES BUTTING
AND GORING.

Among animals there are none that abandon their strong points to utilize their shortcomings.¹⁸

The metaphorical message here is that animals act naturally 自然; their behavior is “thus of itself.” Humans, the *Huainanzi* authors imply, should learn from the naturalness of animals; instead they often fail to utilize their strengths and act upon their weaknesses.

The argument from nature here depends on an understanding that animals, as the text asserts, do not do that which is unnatural to them: “A cobra cannot grow legs.”¹⁹ But if animals (unlike humans) act reliably in ways that conform to their specific natures, species boundaries are understood in a way such that transformation within categories (as defined by particular sets of yin-yang characteristics) is both possible and natural: “[In the ninth month]... sparrows enter the ocean and turn into clams.”²⁰ In other words, sparrows and clams were thought of as two seasonally-varying aspects of the same creature, more yin in winter and more yang in summer. The concept of “transformation” (*hua* 化) here indicates a sort of natural and expected change in accordance with the nature of the thing being transformed, as a passage in Chapter 4 makes clear:

Birds and fish are all born of yin, but are of the class of yang creatures. Thus birds and fish are oviparous.

FISH SWIM THROUGH WATER,
BIRDS FLY IN THE CLOUDS.

Thus at the beginning of winter swallows and sparrows enter the sea and turn into clams.²¹

¹⁷ The identification by commentators of “virgin bugs” (*zhen chong* 貞蟲) as bees and wasps seems to reveal some knowledge of the reproductive biology of social insects, whereby a single fertile “queen” produces all of the colony’s offspring and ordinary “worker” insects are reproductively sterile.

¹⁸ *HNZ* 16.146; 16/167/20–21. ¹⁹ *HNZ* 17.93; 17/171/30. ²⁰ *HNZ* 5.9; 5/44/13, 15.

²¹ *HNZ* 4.11; 4/35/13–15. This explanation for the disappearance of small birds in the cold

These observations lead to a larger point, to which we now turn.

ANIMALS AND CORRELATIVE COSMOLOGY

Animal behavior is both explained by and serves to exemplify the general truth of yin-yang/Five Phases correlative cosmology. Several passages in *Huainanzi* Chapter 4 (“Terrestrial Forms”) stand out within early Chinese literature because of the way in which they integrate observations and descriptions of animals into the larger framework of correlative cosmology.²² One passage relates diet and temperament in terms of three of the Five Phases (water, earth, and wood) and other physical qualities:

THOSE [CREATURES] THAT FEED ON WATER EXCEL AT SWIMMING AND ARE ABLE TO WITHSTAND COLD.

THOSE THAT FEED ON EARTH (I.E., EARTHWORMS) DO NOT HAVE MINDS BUT ARE SENSITIVE.

THOSE THAT FEED ON WOOD (I.E., BEARS)²³ ARE VERY POWERFUL AND ARE FIERCE.

THOSE THAT FEED ON GRASS EXCEL AT RUNNING BUT ARE STUPID.

THOSE THAT FEED ON [MULBERRY] LEAVES PRODUCE SILK AND TURN INTO MOTHS.

THOSE THAT FEED ON FLESH ARE BRAVE AND DARING BUT ARE CRUEL.

THOSE THAT FEED ON QI [ATTAIN] SPIRIT-ILLUMINATION AND ARE LONG-LIVED.

THOSE THAT FEED ON GRAIN ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND CLEVER BUT SHORT-LIVED.

THOSE THAT DO NOT FEED ON ANYTHING DO NOT DIE AND ARE SPIRITS.²⁴

Another gives a numerological explanation of the gestation periods of various animals:

Heaven is one, Earth is two, man is three.

months may seem far-fetched as an attempt to account for what we now know to be the annual migration of birds, but in Europe well into the nineteenth century it was widely believed that in the autumn swallows burrowed into mudbanks and hibernated there.

²² My career-long engagement with the *Huainanzi* began in 1966 with a paper analyzing these passages in Chapter 4 for Professor Sivin’s “Chinese Science” course at MIT; it thus is a particular pleasure to write this essay in his honor.

²³ Commentators identify “creatures that feed on wood” as bears, perhaps a misunderstood reference to bears’ tearing apart rotten logs in search of grubs.

²⁴ *HNZ* 4.9; 4/35/1-3.

- 3 x 3 = 9. 9 x 9 = 81. 1 GOVERNS THE SUN. THE NUMBER OF THE SUN IS 10. THE SUN GOVERNS MAN, SO MAN IS BORN IN THE TENTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 8 x 9 = 72. 2 GOVERNS EVEN NUMBERS. EVEN NUMBERS CONTAIN ODD NUMBERS. ODD NUMBERS GOVERN THE CHRONOGRAMS. THE CHRONOGRAMS GOVERN THE MOON. THE MOON GOVERNS THE HORSE, SO HORSES ARE BORN IN THE TWELFTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 7 x 9 = 63. 3 GOVERNS THE DIPPER. THE DIPPER GOVERNS THE DOG, SO DOGS ARE BORN IN THE THIRD MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 6 x 9 = 54. 4 GOVERNS THE SEASONS. THE SEASONS GOVERN THE PIG, SO PIGS ARE BORN IN THE FOURTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 5 x 9 = 45. 5 GOVERNS THE MUSICAL NOTES [OF THE PENTATONIC SCALE]. THE MUSICAL NOTES GOVERN THE APE, SO APES ARE BORN IN THE FIFTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 4 x 9 = 36. 6 GOVERNS THE NOTES [OF THE PITCHPIPES]. THE PITCHPIPE NOTES GOVERN THE DEER, SO DEER ARE BORN IN THE SIXTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 3 x 9 = 27. 7 GOVERNS THE STARS. THE STARS GOVERN THE TIGER, SO TIGERS ARE BORN IN THE SEVENTH MONTH [OF PREGNANCY].
- 2 x 9 = 18. 8 GOVERNS THE WIND. THE WIND GOVERNS INSECTS, SO INSECTS UNDERGO METAMORPHOSIS IN THE EIGHTH MONTH.²⁵

Another passage, the first part of which was also cited above, approaches the subject of taxonomy by positing a series of opposed qualities (lives in air/lives in water; has incisor teeth/has no incisors; masticates/does not chew; etc.) that in combination can (in principle) uniquely define a creature:

Birds and fish are all born of yin, but are of the class of yang creatures. Thus birds and fish are oviparous.

FISH SWIM THROUGH WATER,
BIRDS FLY IN THE CLOUDS.

Thus at the beginning of winter swallows and sparrows enter the sea and turn into clams. The myriad [living] creatures are all born as different kinds.

SILKWORMS EAT BUT DO NOT DRINK.
CICADAS DRINK BUT DO NOT EAT.

²⁵ *HNZ* 4.10; 4/35/8-13.

Mayflies neither eat nor drink. Armored and scaly creatures eat during the summer but hibernate in winter.

ANIMALS THAT EAT WITHOUT MASTICATION HAVE EIGHT
BODILY OPENINGS AND ARE OVIPAROUS.

ANIMALS THAT CHEW HAVE NINE BODILY OPENINGS AND ARE
VIVIPAROUS.

Quadrupeds do not have feathers or wings. Animals that have horns do not have upper [incisor] teeth.

[SOME] ANIMALS DO NOT HAVE HORNS AND ARE FAT, BUT DO
NOT HAVE INCISOR TEETH.

[OTHER ANIMALS] HAVE HORNS AND ARE FAT, BUT DO NOT
HAVE MOLAR TEETH.²⁶

This passage begins with what in the West are called “lower animals,” and proceeds via oviparous animals to mammals, making additional taxonomic distinctions among some of the latter. A hierarchy is thus implied but not emphasized; one may posit that the hierarchy is conceived as one of complexity but not necessarily of value – there is no indication in the *Huainanzi* that, from the perspective of the Way, one animal is to be valued more than another. The passage just quoted is complemented by a passage from Chapter 1:

THOSE WITH WINGS SIT ON THEIR NESTS AND HATCH EGGS,
THOSE WITH HAIR GESTATE AND GIVE BIRTH TO THEIR
YOUNG.²⁷

Another passage in Chapter 4 seems to hint at an evolutionary, and again weakly hierarchical, explanation for the diversity of animals and plants within larger categories:

Hairy Heifer gave birth to Responsive Dragon. Responsive Dragon gave birth to Establish-Horse. Establish-Horse gave birth to the *qilin* 麒麟. The *qilin* gave birth to ordinary beasts. Hairy animals in general are born from ordinary beasts.

Scaly One gave birth to Wriggling Dragon. Wriggling Dragon gave birth to Leviathan. Leviathan gave birth to Establish-Emanation. Establish-Emanation gave birth to ordinary fishes. Scaly creatures in general are born from ordinary fishes.

Armored Abyss gave birth to First Dragon. First Dragon gave birth to Dark Sea-Turtle. Dark Sea-Turtle gave birth to Divine Tortoise. Divine Tortoise gave birth to ordinary turtles. Armored creatures in general are born from ordinary turtles.²⁸

²⁶ *HNZ* 4.11; 4/35/13-19.

²⁷ *HNZ* 1.7; 1/3/17.

²⁸ *HNZ* 4.18; 4/36/2-5.

(Similar genealogies are given for humans, birds, trees, herbaceous plants, and aquatic plants.)

Three passages from later chapters make interesting observations about questions of scale and biomechanics:

Suppose the stride of a rabbit were made as big as that of a horse. It could keep up with the sun and pursue the wind. If [a rabbit] actually became [as big as] a horse, though, it would not be able to run at all.²⁹

THE STEAMY VAPOR [RISING FROM] CATTLE AND HORSES PRO-
DUCE MAGGOTS AND LICE;
BUT THE STEAMY VAPOR FROM MAGGOTS AND LICE CANNOT
PRODUCE CATTLE AND HORSES.³⁰
A FOX CANNOT BE USED TO ATTACK AN OX;
TIGERS CANNOT BE USED TO CATCH RATS.³¹

It would be a mistake, however, to put too much weight upon the “scientific” or proto-scientific nature of these passages. Overwhelmingly, the text is interested in animals less as objects of study in their own right than as a source of ready-made metaphors about the human world. Much of the *Huainanzi* animal lore concerns the nature of interactions of humans and animals, or draws contrasts between humans and animals (generally to the effect that the former are “active” 爲 and artificial whereas the latter act “naturally”).

HUMANS’ CONTROL OF ANIMALS

A major point emphasized by the *Huainanzi*’s authors is that human nature includes intelligence and artifice to a degree that far surpasses that of animals; therefore humans can control animals. In general animals are portrayed as living in a “state of nature” with unmediated, instinctive behaviors:

All creatures that have blood and *qi*
ARE EQUIPPED WITH TEETH AND HORNS;
THEY HAVE CLAWS IN FRONT AND PAWS BEHIND.
THOSE WITH HORNS GORE;
THOSE WITH TEETH BITE;
THOSE WITH POISON STING;
THOSE WITH HOOVES KICK.
WHEN THEY ARE HAPPY THEY PLAY WITH ONE ANOTHER,

²⁹ *HNZ* 17.48; 17/171/21. ³⁰ *HNZ* 20.6; 20/211/14-15. ³¹ *HNZ* 9.22; 9/74/24-25.

WHEN THEY ARE ANGRY THEY INJURE ONE ANOTHER;
This is their Heaven[-born] nature.³²

This is quite different from the nature of humans:

WHAT HEAVEN CREATES INCLUDES BIRDS, BEASTS, PLANTS,
AND TREES.
WHAT HUMANKIND CREATES INCLUDES RITES, CEREMONIES,
REGULATIONS AND MEASURES.³³

Thus

THAT THE OX TREADS ON CLOVEN HOOVES AND GROWS HORNS,
AND THAT THE HORSE HAS A MANE AND SQUARE HOOVES,

This is Heavenly (i.e., natural).

YET TO PUT A BIT IN A HORSE'S MOUTH
AND TO PUT A RING THROUGH AN OX'S NOSE,

This is human.³⁴

A principal reason why humans are able to dominate animals (despite, in many cases, the animals' superior physical attributes) is that humans have language and animals do not:

What Yin and Yang produce, [from] the essence of blood and *qi*, [are] creatures that have

A MOUTHFUL OF TEETH OR A HEAD BEARING HORNS,
FRONT CLAWS OR REAR HOOVES,
SOARING WINGS OR CLUTCHING TALONS,

that advance by wriggling or move by crawling.

WHEN HAPPY THEY ARE HARMONIOUS,
WHEN ANGRY THEY ARE QUARRELSOME;
SEEING BENEFIT THEY PURSUE IT,
AVOIDING HARM THEY WITHDRAW FROM IT.

Their instinctive responses in this respect are one. Although in their likes and dislikes they do not differ from people, nonetheless,

THOUGH THEIR CLAWS AND TEETH ARE SHARP,
THOUGH THEIR MUSCLES AND BONES ARE STRONG,

they cannot avoid being controlled by people, [because]

THEY CANNOT COMMUNICATE THEIR INTELLIGENCE TO ONE
ANOTHER,

AND THEIR ABILITIES AND STRENGTH CANNOT BE MADE TO ACT
AS ONE.

³² *HNZ* 15.1; 15/142/22-23.

³³ *HNZ* 20.33; 20/221/5.

³⁴ *HNZ* 1.8; 1/4/6-7.

Each has its natural propensity that is not endowed or received from the outside. Thus their strengths have confines and their accomplishments have limits.³⁵

Tigers and leopards have better speed, black bears and brown bears have more strength, yet people eat their meat and make mats of their hides, because [animals] are not able to communicate their knowledge and unite their strength.³⁶

Intelligent speech, as distinguished from mere mimicry, is regarded by the *Huainanzi* authors as a uniquely human ability. The vocal talents of parrots, for example, are acknowledged but ultimately dismissed: “A parrot can speak, but it cannot engage in meaningful discourse. Why is this? It has the power of speech, but does not have anything to say.”³⁷ And intelligent speech gives humans the ability to control animals (as for example through hunting or domestication) – a situation that is advantageous to humans but not necessarily desirable from the point of view of the animals.

Along with language, and by its means, people have the capacity to make plans, create equipment, and devise long-range strategies, all of which allow them to overcome the sheer physical vitality of animals; by extension, the enlightened ruler is able to impose his will upon the people at large:

Now when a horse is a young colt it jumps and kicks, raises its tail and runs, and people cannot control it.

ITS BITE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO PIERCE FLESH AND BREAK
BONES
AND ITS KICK IS HARD ENOUGH TO BREAK A SKULL OR CRUSH A
CHEST.

But

WHEN A GROOM TAMES IT
OR A FINE CHARIOTEER TRAINS IT,
THEY RESTRAIN IT WITH BRIDLE AND HARNESS
AND LEAD IT WITH REIN AND BIT,

so that even if it must cross a precipice or leap a ditch, it would not dare to shy away. Thus, its form makes it a horse,³⁸ and a horse cannot be transformed [into anything else.] That the horse can be mounted and ridden is achieved through training. A horse

³⁵ *HNZ* 19.5; 19/205/26–19/206/4.

³⁶ *HNZ* 15.16; 15/149/9–10.

³⁷ *HNZ* 16.8; 16/155/1.

³⁸ The idea that form (*xing* 形) is the essential characteristic of differentiated identity is found widely in Warring States and early Han texts; see for example *Zhuangzi* 6/16/25, “The Great Clod has endowed me with form....”

is a dumb brute and yet it is possible to penetrate through to its vital energy and will by relying on training to perfect the horse. How much more is this true of people!³⁹

THUS, DEER AND ELK CAN BE SEIZED BY SNARES;
FISH AND TURTLES CAN BE TAKEN BY NETS;
GEESE AND SWANS CAN BE COLLECTED WITH THE DART AND
LINE.

Only to the formless may nothing be done.⁴⁰

ANIMALS AS TEACHERS

Because humans and animals exist on a continuous spectrum of life forms, with things in common as well as points of differentiation, the behavior of animals can teach lessons about human society and the nature of sage rulership. The authors attribute learning from the behavior of animals to the worthies of antiquity:

[THE POEM] “GUAN JU”⁴¹ ORIGINATED FROM [THE CRY OF] A BIRD. THE SUPERIOR MAN PRAISES IT BECAUSE IT ADVOCATES THAT THE FEMALE AND THE MALE SHOULD NOT LEAVE THEIR NEST.

[THE POEM] “LU MING”⁴² ORIGINATED FROM [THE CRY OF] AN ANIMAL. THE SUPERIOR MAN EXALTS IT BECAUSE IT DESCRIBES HOW DEER, HAVING FOUND FOOD, CALL TO EACH OTHER [TO SHARE IT].⁴³

The origin of music is also attributed to the cries of birds, as observed and recorded by sages in antiquity:

3 + 5 = 8. Creatures born from eggs have eight bodily orifices. This was the beginning of the pitchpipes. [The ancients] recorded the sounds of the phoenix; therefore the notes are born from eight.⁴⁴

Thus, although humans are distinguished from animals in many ways (perhaps most notably by language and the abilities it makes possible), important aspects of human culture (here, literary production and music) are attributed in part to the behavior of animals.

The text presents numerous examples of how animal behavior can guide the behavior of humans. Among the most important and oft-re-

³⁹ *HNZ* 19.4; 19/204/15-18.

⁴⁰ *HNZ* 15.17; 15/149/19-21.

⁴¹ *Odes* 1; it begins with the cry of birds traditionally identified as ospreys.

⁴² *Odes* 161; it begins with the cry of the deer.

⁴³ *HNZ* 20.13; 20/214/10-11.

⁴⁴ *HNZ* 3.29; 3/25/24-25.

peated of these lessons is to practice non-action 無爲 and to follow the natural propensities of things.

Thus if you can follow [the nature of things], you will be matchless in the world. Now if things first have what is natural to them, afterwards human affairs can be governed. Thus You can

DRIVE A HORSE AND LEAD AN OX,
USE A ROOSTER TO ANNOUNCE NIGHT'S END,
AND TELL A DOG TO GUARD THE GATE —

because it follows their natures.⁴⁵

Understanding the natural propensities of things allows the sage ruler to understand dangers (such as those posed by deceitful or flattering ministers) against which precautions must be taken:

ONE WHO RAISES FISH IN A POND MUST FEND OFF OTTERS;
ONE WHO RAISES BIRDS AND ANIMALS MUST LIKEWISE FEND OFF
WOLVES.

How much more so the one who governs people!⁴⁶

If the ruler fails to conduct himself in accordance with non-action, and tries to force affairs in unnatural ways, he places himself in danger, powerful though he may be:

IF A FISH [LARGE ENOUGH TO] SWALLOW A BOAT LEAPS OUT OF
THE WATER, IT WILL BE OVERCOME BY CRICKETS AND ANTS,
BECAUSE IT HAS LEFT ITS DWELLING PLACE.

IF AN APE OR A MONKEY LEAVES ITS TREE, IT WILL BE CAUGHT
BY A FOX OR RACCOON-DOG, BECAUSE IT IS OUT OF [ITS
PROPER] PLACE.⁴⁷

When the sage acts, ordinary people cannot but respond:

[WHEN] YŪ GRASPED A SHIELD AND A BATTLEAXE AND DANCED
ON THE DOUBLE STAIRCASE, THE THREE MIAO TRIBES SUB-
MITTED [TO HIS RULE].

WHEN AN EAGLE HOVERS ABOVE THE RIVER, FISH AND TURTLES
PLUNGE AND FLYING BIRDS SCATTER.

By necessity they distance themselves from harm.⁴⁸

Sagely rule does not depend on the exercise of raw power, but rather on concentrating the will and behaving with singleness of purpose:

The earthworm lacks strength of muscles and bones and sharpness of claws and teeth, but above it eats dry earth and below it drinks of the Yellow Springs. It uses its mind in a unitary way.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *HNZ* 20.10; 20/212/11,13. ⁴⁶ *HNZ* 15.2; 15/143/10. ⁴⁷ *HNZ* 9.25; 9/76/22.

⁴⁸ *HNZ* 10.27; 10/84/28-10/85/1. ⁴⁹ *HNZ* 16.4; 16/154/16-17.

MOTHS AND ANTS CAN FELL PILLARS AND BRIDGES.
 MOSQUITOES AND GADFLIES CAN STAMPEDE CATTLE AND
 SHEEP.⁵⁰

In addition, the sage has a breadth of vision that far surpasses that of ordinary humans (let alone of animals):

YOU CAN'T TALK TO A FISH IN A WELL ABOUT GREAT THINGS
 BECAUSE IT IS CONFINED BY ITS NARROW SPACE.
 YOU CAN'T TALK TO A SUMMER BUG ABOUT THE COLD BECAUSE
 IT IS RESTRICTED TO ITS SEASON.

You can't talk to petty scholars about the Utmost Way because they are confined by the vulgar and bound up by their traditional teaching.⁵¹

If you

GRASP A CROSSBOW AND CALL A BIRD
 OR BRANDISH A CLUB AND BECKON A DOG,

then what you want to come will surely go away instead. Thus,

A FISH CANNOT BE HOOKED WITHOUT BAIT;
 AN ANIMAL CANNOT BE LURED WITH AN EMPTY TRAP.⁵²

The sage also has the ability to see beyond superficial qualities to get at the essential truth within them; the sage rules by aligning himself with the Way:

Now,

THE EYES OF THE OWL ARE LARGE BUT ITS VISION DOES NOT
 COMPARE TO THAT OF THE RAT;
 THE FEET OF THE MILLIPEDE ARE NUMEROUS BUT ITS SPEED
 DOES NOT COMPARE TO A SNAKE'S.

With things, it is certainly true that there are instances wherein

BEING LARGE DOES NOT COMPARE TO BEING SMALL,
 OR BEING NUMEROUS DOES NOT COMPARE TO BEING FEW.

When it comes to

THE STRENGTH WITHIN WEAKNESS AND THE WEAKNESS WITHIN
 STRENGTH,
 THE DANGER WITHIN SAFETY AND THE SURVIVAL WITHIN DE-
 STRUCTION,

if not for a sage, who could see it!⁵³

⁵⁰ *HNZ* 18.17; 18/195/29. ⁵¹ *HNZ* 1.8; 1/4/7-9. ⁵² *HNZ* 16.34; 16/157/14-15.

⁵³ *HNZ* 13.22; 13/131/30-13/132/1.

If you lash a snapping dog or whip a kicking horse in order to teach them, although you be as gifted as Yi Yin or Zaofu,⁵⁴ you cannot transform them this way. But if the heart that wishes to harm others disappears from within you then you can pull the tail of a hungry tiger; how much more can you tame such things as dogs and horses.⁵⁵

The sage himself surpasses ordinary humans as dragons surpass ordinary animals:

Now a red *chi* dragon and a green *qiu* dragon⁵⁶ were roaming around in Ji [province].

THE SKY WAS BLUE,
THE EARTH TRANQUIL.
VENOMOUS ANIMALS DID NOT MAKE AN APPEARANCE;
FLYING BIRDS DID NOT STARTLE THEM.
ENTERING A THORNY THICKET,
THEY FED ON PLUMS AND FODDER.

Enjoying the taste and savoring the sweetness, they didn't stray outside a space of a hundred *mou* 畝. So the snakes and swamp-eels took them lightly, and thought that the dragons would not be able to tussle with them and win, [whether] in the river or the ocean. But when [the dragons ascended] to the dark clouds in the pale dawn, yin and yang engaged and struggled.⁵⁷ [The dragons] descended on the wind, tangled in squalls of rain, rode the billows and ascended again, awesomely moving heaven and earth. The sound of thunder penetrated to the midst of the ocean. [Then] the snakes and swamp-eels burrowed a hundred *ren* 刃 into the mud. Black bears and brown bears crawled away to the crags of hills and mountains; tigers and leopards sheltered in caves and did not dare to roar; gibbons and monkeys tumbled down headfirst and lost their grip on the trees and branches – how much more [affected] were mere snakes and swamp-eels!⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Yi Yin was a (legendary) virtuous minister in service to Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty; Zaofu was the (also legendary) charioteer for king Mu of the Zhou dynasty, cited frequently in early literature as the paradigm of an excellent charioteer.

⁵⁵ *HNZ* 1.6; 1/3/5-7.

⁵⁶ Commentators explain that the *chi* 螭 dragon is hornless, and the *qiu* 虬 dragon has horns.

⁵⁷ The two dragons, one red (south, maximum yang), one green (east, lesser yang) would both normally be seen as yang creatures, and so this statement about yin and yang “struggling” seems at first glance puzzling. I suspect that the resolution of this apparent paradox is that the dragons are a male-female pair, and their aerial engagement is a courtship or mating flight.

⁵⁸ *HNZ* 6.5; 6/51/23-27.

Finally, we see from the historical example of the First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuangdi) that active, forceful government that does not comply with the Way is as short-sighted as the behavior of birds and animals that instinctively take account of some long-term threats but fail to grasp more immediate dangers. This metaphor refers specifically to Qin Shihuangdi's policies of building the Great Wall and undertaking foreign conquests in Yue, policies that promised strategic advantages but quickly produced crises instead.

When the magpie first notices that the [season of] the year is becoming very windy, it leaves the high trees and makes its nest in the lower branches. Adult [humans] who pass by thus take their chicks; children who come by steal their eggs. It knows to prepare against distant troubles yet forgets the nearer disaster. Thus,

THE PREPARATIONS OF QIN

EQUAL THE WISDOM OF THE MAGPIE.⁵⁹

The fall of Qin is thus specifically linked with a failure to foresee the short-term consequences of policies that were intended to bring long-term benefits; the Qin did indeed build public-works projects, for example, but the oppression of the common people consequent to those construction projects was a source of the dynasty's downfall. (Interestingly, in *Huainanzi*, written seventy years or so after the fall of Qin, those rulers are portrayed as short-sighted, cruel, and unwise, but not as the unambiguous incarnations of bad government that they became in later historiography.)

CONCLUSION

Thus we see from these examples (which could be multiplied several times over with similar citations from the text) that the authors of *Huainanzi* repeatedly turned to the world of animal behavior to make important metaphorical points about the world of human affairs, and especially about the nature of sagely government. Looking at these very conspicuous examples of animal lore and animal imagery in the *Huainanzi*, one might hazard several conclusions.

First, the authors assumed that their audience would be familiar, by name and general characteristics, with a large number of animals, particularly carnivorous mammals but also many domestic and wild herbivores as well as birds, reptiles, fish, and invertebrates of various kinds. This confirms what one would expect from the nature of Han

⁵⁹ *HNZ* 18.20; 18/197/21–22.

ruling-class society itself, where men (readers of *Huainanzi* would have been overwhelmingly male), even those residing in the capital in government service, would have extensive rural estates, would have traveled in chariots and ridden on horseback, and probably engaged in hunting on a regular basis. Almost all would have had some personal experience of both wild and domestic animals. On the other hand such men would not necessarily have personal experience of certain kinds of large wild animals, particularly those from southern regions (elephants, leopards and gibbons, for example). Descriptions of exotic animals do not necessarily reflect direct observation or detailed knowledge on the part of the *Huainanzi* authors and readers.

Second, readers of the *Huainanzi* would be accustomed to thinking of animals in metaphorical terms, such that a general proposition that “some animal behaves thus-and-so, and people do also” would be comprehensible and credible. This implies an attitude that assumes that animals and people form a class, or at least display a continuity of nature and disposition, such that the behavior of one is explicable in terms of the behavior of another. And while species barriers are largely fixed (“cobras cannot grow legs”), there is a continuum of consciousness and behavior across the spectrum of animals and humans. The characteristics and behavior of animals, like that of the phenomenal world as a whole, are understandable and explainable in terms of yin-yang/Five Phase correlative cosmology.

Third, the *Huainanzi* authors appear to be far more interested in animals in their interactions with the human world, and their behaviors as metaphors for human behaviors, than as objects of observation and study in their own right. There are a few hints of what might be termed “natural history” in *Huainanzi* 4 and a few other places, but overall the text does not display much interest in the systematic study of nature. One may say that despite the conspicuous presence in the book of dozens of species of animals, wild and domestic, mentioned by name and often with an impressive degree of familiarity with appearance and habits, the authors show little interest in the study of the natural world as such. Nothing in *Huainanzi* or in the whole corpus of extant Warring States and Han literature adds up to what one might find in Greek or Roman works about animals – nothing remotely approaches Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, for example.⁶⁰ Despite a few hints in the areas of animal behavior and taxonomy, there is nothing

⁶⁰ Some readers of this essay may wish to consult, for purposes of comparison, Norman Douglas’s *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1928).

in the *Huainanzi* or other literature of the time that one could plausibly characterize as a science of animals.

One might object that there is little about animals in Aristotle's *Politics*, either. Isn't it unfair to expect much interest in animal lore in a fundamentally political work such as *Huainanzi*? But it would be a misunderstanding of the *Huainanzi* to see it as being entirely devoted to political concerns. Elsewhere I have described the work as a compendium of everything a modern monarch needs to know. In Chapters Three and Four one finds, for the ruler's edification, much information about astronomy and astrology, geography and topography, and other fields of natural history, but only tentative and rudimentary steps in the direction of a natural science of animals. Evidently, to judge from the digest of information and interpretation that constitutes the *Huainanzi* text, what the monarch needed to know about animals (beyond his own direct experience of domestic animals and of wild beasts in zoos and hunting parks) was mainly that they could be used to make elegant metaphorical arguments about the nature and behavior of humans, the better to understand, guide, and rule them as subjects of the Son of Heaven.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HNZ D. C. Lau, ed., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引

The rubric "*HNZ*" is used in addition to convey chapter and section numbers in Major, Queen, Meyer, and Roth, *The Huainanzi* (forthcoming); see note 7.