

Chung-ying Cheng, from *Environmental Ethics*, Vol, 8, No. 4, 1986.

Cheng finds different bases for environmental ethics in Western and Chinese thought. He finds in the materialist and Cartesian traditions of the West a reduction of nature to something external and passive. In the Chinese concept of the Tao, on the other hand, nature is active and cannot be reduced to a mere external object or a machine.

The West focuses on an external relation between humans and the environment; Chinese thought focuses on an internal relationship between humans and the environment that stresses interdependence and harmony between humans and the world. When nature is viewed as external to humans, the relationship is one in which humans try to conquer nature. When humans and nature are interdependent, on the other hand, humans are the consummators rather than the conquerors or dominators of nature. "Man can enlarge the Way (Tao) rather than the Way enlarging man" according to a saying of Confucius.

Western thinkers tend to see the world as divisible into separate atomistic units; cause and effect can be reduced to a single cause for a single effect. Chinese thinkers, by contrast, take a multi-layered view of cause and effect. A single effect may have multiple causes, and a single cause may have multiple effects. The differences between the holistic approach to medicine in China and the mechanistic approach to medicine in the West illustrate the different understandings of causality.

Cheng also contrasts the Western and Chinese views on another issue. While the West tends to view the creation as a completed work of mechanical forces, Chinese tradition views the world as a dynamic process. Some in the West hold that the universe is a project completed by a transcendent God; the Chinese hold that the universe is a continuous process of production and reproduction of life.