The Confucian ideal of harmony

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He 和 (harmony, harmonization) is probably the most cherished ideal in Chinese culture. Unfortunately, given its significance, it is arguably also the most understudied. It is therefore high time for some serious study of this ideal. This essay focuses on the Confucian tradition. It first explores the meaning of the Confucian notion of he; then it provides a philosophical analysis and exposition; finally, on the basis of value pluralism, this study offers a justification for this Confucian approach to today’s world philosophy and world-cultural politics.

The Confucian Ethical, Political, and Metaphysical Ideal of He

He is usually translated into English as “harmony,” although it may be more appropriately rendered as “harmonization” in certain contexts. The word predates Confucianism. Its earliest form can be found in the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells from the Shang dynasty (sixteenth to eleventh centuries B.C.E.) and later more frequently in inscriptions on the bronze utensils of the Zhou dynasty (1066–256 B.C.E.).¹ In the earliest Confucian texts, we can find numerous occurrences of he. Its meaning in these texts mostly has to do with sounds and how sounds interact with one another. It was probably used more frequently as a verb than a noun. The text of the “Zhongfu” 中孚 hexagram in the Yijing 易經 states, “A crane sings in the woods and its young respond (he) to it” (鶴鳴在陰，其子和之). Zuozhuan 左傳 “Zhuanggong” 22 庄公二十二年 states, “The male and female phoenixes fly together and their sounds respond to each other (he) vigorously” (鳳凰于飛，和鳴锵鏘). The Shijing 詩經 “Zhengfeng” 鄭風 contains the expression “responding (he) to brothers with songs” (叔兮伯兮，倡予和女). In Analects 7.31 we find “When Confucius sang with others and saw someone did well, he always made the person repeat the song before he responded (he)” (子與人歌而善，必使反之，而後和之). Finally, in the Zhouli 周禮 “Diguan” 地官 there is the passage “to use [the musical instrument] chun to respond (he) to drums” (以金錞和鼓). In all these instances, he evidently is used to describe how various sounds—of animals, of people, and of instruments—respond to one another. This meaning of “responding” is preserved in the modern Chinese language when he is used as a verb (with the fourth tone), as in he shi 和詩—composing a poem in response to another poem by someone else. Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124 A.D.E.), in his lexicon Shuowen jiezi 說文解字, simply defines he as “mutual responsiveness [of sounds]” (相應也). As a lexical definition, Xu’s is a report of these usages of he in earlier texts, and it summarizes the root meaning of the word.
However, mere mutual responsiveness is not yet harmony. Harmony results only when sounds respond to one another in an appropriate way. One of the earliest definitions of he as harmony, several hundred years before Xu Shen, can be found in the Guoyu 国语, a classic text written during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.E.) in close association with the Confucian tradition. In the chapter “Zhouyu B” 周语下, it is stated that “when sounds correspond and mutually bao one another it is called he” (声应相保曰和). Bao 保 has a number of interrelated meanings such as “protect” (baohu 保护), “nurture” (yangyu 养育), “rely on” (yikao 依靠), “stabilize” (anding 安定), and “assure” (baozheng 保障).2 Understood this way, he does not simply mean that sounds mutually respond, but rather that various sounds respond to one another in a mutually promoting, mutually complementing, and mutually stabilizing way. In this sense, some of the expressions cited above can be interpreted as harmonization. For example, the expression in Zuozhuan “Zhuanggong” 22 can be interpreted as “The male and female phoenixes fly together and their sounds harmonize with vigor.” The expression in the Zhouli “Diguan” can be read as saying “to use [the musical instrument] chun to harmonize the [sounds of] drums.” As such, expressions like “the he of the five sounds” (五声之和) in Zuozhuan “Xigong” 24 僖公二十四年 do not mean merely the mutual response of sounds, but also the harmonious interplay of these sounds. He is used here as a noun, standing for a (dynamic) state of music rather than simply one sound responding to another. Therefore, we may conclude that the original meaning of he as harmony comes from the rhythmic interplay of various sounds, either in nature or between human beings, that is musical to the human ear, and that the prototype of he is found in music.4 From the notion of he as the harmonious interplay of sounds, it is not difficult to see how this can be expanded, by analogous thinking, to mean harmony in other things and hence harmony in general.

Thus, we can say that, philosophically, harmony presupposes the existence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them. One of the earliest expressions of he was proposed by Shi Bo 史伯, a pre-Confucian scholar-minister who lived toward the end of the Western Zhou period (1066–771 B.C.E.). In the Guoyu “Zhengyu” 郑语, Shi Bo elaborates on he:

Harmony (he) is indeed productive of things. But sameness does not advance growth.5 Smoothing one thing with another is called harmony. For this reason things come together and flourish. If one uses the same thing to complement the same thing, it is a dead end and will become wasted.

夫和實生物，同則不繼。以他平他謂之和，故能豐長而物歸之，若以同裨同，盡乃棄矣。

This is so because,

A single sound is nothing to hear, a single color does not make a pattern, a single taste does not satisfy the stomach, and a single item does not harmonize.

聲一無聽，物一無文，味一無果，物一不講。7

According to Shi Bo, he was the philosophy of ancient sage-kings and it enabled their societies to prosper:
Therefore the early kings mixed Earth with Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire, and produced varieties of things. They balanced one’s taste with the five flavors, strengthened the four limbs in order to guard the body, harmonized the six measures of sounds to improve the hearing, made the seven parts of the body upright to maintain the heart/mind, balanced the eight body parts to complete the whole person, established the nine social rules to set up pure virtues, and put together the ten offices to regulate the multitude. Therefore, there came into existence thousands of categories and tens of thousands of methods used in calculating millions of things and evaluating myriads of properties. They maintained constant incomes and managed countless items. Therefore the kings had land of nine provinces and had incomes to raise the multitude. They taught the people adequate lessons and harmonized them as one family. Thus, it was harmony at the highest level.

These sage-kings also set themselves as examples in promoting he:

The early kings married their wives from other families, sought wealth in all directions, and chose ministers who could remonstrate with the ruler. This way they reconciled a multitude of things. They were engaged in harmonization. For Shi Bo, a harmonious world must be a diverse world. This is so because a healthy and prosperous world relies on its diverse things to go together. This is why the ancient sage-kings sought diversity. As in good cooking and in good music making, a healthy family must consist of spouses from different tribes, a prosperous nation must seek wealth from various sources, and a good government must have ministers capable of holding different opinions. Harmony out of diversity produces a lively world; sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end.

Zuo zhuan “Shaogong” 20 昭公二十年 records a discussion of he by another scholar-minister, Yan Zi 晏子 (750–500 B.C.E.):

Harmony (he) is like making soup. One needs water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum to cook fish and meat. One needs to cook them with firewood, combine them together in order to balance the taste. One needs to compensate for deficiencies and reduce excessiveness. The virtuous person (junzi) eats such balanced food in order to purify his heart/mind.

The cook needs different things to make a balanced soup. She needs ingredients that taste and smell very different. Water and fire are usually seen as diametrically opposed to each other, yet both are indispensable for cooking. One important aspect of good cooking is to be able to balance one excessive flavor with another. Yan Zi believes that enjoying this kind of harmonized food can purify a virtuous person’s heart/mind (xin). He continues:
Sounds are like flavors. Different elements complete with one other: one breath, two styles, three types, four instruments, five sounds, six measures, seven notes, eight winds, and nine songs. Different sounds complement one another: the pure and the impure, the big and the small, the short and the long, the fast and the slow, the sorrowful and the joyful, the strong and the tender, the late and the quick, the high and the low, the in and the out, and the inclusive and the noninclusive. Listening to this kind of music, the heart/mind of the virtuous person (junzi) is purified.

For Yan Zi, good music (e.g., a symphony) requires a variety of sounds in various modes. A good musician is like a good cook, capable of combining various sounds, some in sharp contrast, to make a coherent and harmonious piece. As with a good soup, enjoying good music can also purify people’s heart/mind.

Based on this understanding of he, Yan Zi argues that he must be distinguished from another notion, tong 同 or sameness. In Yan Zi’s conversation with the duke of Qi, the duke evidently confuses he with tong when he praises how harmonious (he) it is between him and his minister Ju 据. Yan Zi points out that the relationship between the duke and his minister Ju is described more appropriately as tong, not he. Yan Zi uses the above-mentioned examples of cooking and making music to show that he is not to be confused with tong. Yan Zi says that the moral of his examples of he also applies to the relationship between the ruler and ministers (君臣亦然). He says:

When the duke says “yes,” Ju also says “yes”; when the duke says “no,” Ju also says “no.” This is like mixing water with water. Who can eat such a soup? This is like using the same kind of instruments to produce music. Who can enjoy such music? This is why it is not all right to be tong.

君所謂可，據亦曰可；君所謂否，據亦曰否。若以水濟水，誰能食之？若琴瑟之專壹，誰能聽之？同之不可也如是。

For Yan Zi, the relationship between the ruler and the minister should be a harmonious one, not one of sameness. A harmonious relationship presupposes that they have different perspectives and different views on various issues. One may say that tong without adequate differences precludes harmony, and such a state is like a soup made of only one ingredient or a symphony composed of only one kind of instrument. A soup made of only one ingredient is tasteless, a symphony composed of only one instrument is boring, and a government consisting of only one voice is stagnant and dangerous.

Neither Shi Bo nor Yan Zi was a Confucian thinker. What is relevant to my thesis here is the fact that they are quoted and appropriated in the Confucian classics Zuozhuan and Guoyu, and that he later became a central ideal of Confucianism. In the Analects Confucius adopts the ideal of he, making he a criterion for the good person (junzi). He says that “The junzi harmonizes but does not seek sameness, whereas the petty person seeks sameness but does not harmonize” (君子和而不同，小人同而不和) (Analects 13.23). For Confucius, a sensible person should be able to
respect different opinions and be able to work with different people in a harmonious way. A major function of *li* (rites, rituals of propriety) is precisely to harmonize people of various kinds. The Confucian disciple You Ruo 有若 is recorded in the *Analects* as saying, “Of the functions of *li* harmonization is the [most] precious” (禮之用，和為貴) (*Analects* 1.12). There is little need to emphasize how Confucius valued the use of *li*. Confucius and Confucians see a direct connection between *li* and *he*. They take *li* to be a central aspect of government and believe that through the good use of *li*, good government results in a harmonious society. According to the *Zhouli* “Tianguan” 天官, another Confucian classic, one of the six primary functions of the Greater Minister (大宰) is “[to minister] state rituals (li), in order to harmonize the nation” (禮典，以和邦國).9

Mencius also highly values *he*. He comments that among the three important things in human affairs, harmony among people is the most important: “good timing is not as good as being advantageously situated, and being advantageously situated is not as good as having harmonious people” (天時不如地利，地利不如人和) (*Mencius* 3B.1). In order to achieve a major goal in social affairs, one would need all three: good timing, being advantageously situated, and having harmonious people. The most precious thing, however, is to have people who work in harmony with one another. Mencius praises Liu Xiahui 柳下慧 as “the sage who is able to harmonize” (聖之和者也) (*Mencius* 5B.1). Liu is well known for his familiarity with *li* and for his firm belief in harmonious coexistence. 10

Xunzi 荀子 (313?–238 B.C.E.) also emphasizes *he*. He concurs with Confucius on the importance of *li* to harmony. Xunzi says that “[only] when following *li* is one harmonious and regulated” (由禮則和節) (*Xunzi* 荀子 “Xiushen” 修身). He also echoes Confucius in saying that “To harmonize with others by goodness is being reasonably accommodating” (以善和人者謂之順) and “to harmonize with others by wickedness is fawning” (以不善和人者謂之諛) (ibid.). For Xunzi, harmony is not without principle. This strikes a similar note with Confucius, whose ideal of harmony is “harmony without mindlessly following others” (和而不流) (*Zhong-yong* 10).

He is not just about human relations. The “Jiaotesheng” 郊特性牲 in the Confucian classic *Liji* 礼記 states, “When *yin* and *yang* harmonize, the myriad things get their due” (陰陽和而萬物得). Xunzi elaborates on the same idea in more detail: “With the great transformation of *yin* and *yang*, the generous supply of wind and rain, the myriad things each become harmonized so that they can live, and get their nurture so that they can grow” (陰陽大化，風雨博施，萬物各得其和以生，各得其養以成) (*Xunzi* “Tianlun”). Here Xunzi concurs with the *Yijing*, which develops the notion of “grand harmony” (太和): “How great is *Qian* (Heaven)! From it the myriad things originate under Heaven. . . . With the changes of the *Qian* way, the myriad things all keep on their own path of life. Thus they preserve the grand harmony” (太哉乾坤，萬物資始，乃統天…乾道变化，各正性命。保合太和) (*Yijing* 易經, “Qian” 乾, “Tuanzhuan” 象傳). “Grand Harmony” is the most important ideal in the *Yijing*. The world is full of different things, yet all these things harmonize even as they constantly change. Confucians have faith in this ultimate harmony among the things in the world.

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Perhaps the most concentrated articulation and elaboration of this Confucian ideal of harmony is found in the classic text Zhongyong 中庸, which states, "Centrality is the great foundation under Heaven, and harmony is the great way under Heaven. In achieving centrality and harmony, Heaven and Earth maintain their appropriate positions and the myriad things flourish" (中者也，天下之大本也，和也者，天下之達道也。致中和，天地位焉，萬物育焉). In a separate essay I have argued that, in the Zhongyong, centrality is the way to achieve harmony. Without harmony, Heaven and Earth would be out of their proper places, and nothing in the world would be able to flourish. Therefore, harmony is the highest ideal in the Zhongyong. Because the Zhongyong lays out the foundation for Confucian metaphysics, we can say that harmony is the highest ideal for Confucianism as a whole.

Harmony, as understood in Confucianism, can occur at various levels. It can take place within the individual. A person can harmonize various parts of his or her body, the mind-heart, and various pursuits in life into a well-functioning, organic whole. Harmony can take place between individuals at the level of the family, the community, the nation, and the world. This may include harmony between societies, harmony within a society with different ethnic groups (or political parties), harmony within the same ethnic group with different kin, and harmony among the same kin. Harmony also can take place between human beings and the natural universe. Confucianism does not exclude intrapersonal harmony, which Daoism emphasizes, but Confucianism puts tremendous weight on interpersonal harmony, such as the harmony between ruler and minister, between parent and child, between husband and wife, between siblings, and between friends. It also places tremendous weight on the harmony between human society and the natural world. Its ultimate goal is to achieve a grand harmony throughout the cosmos.

For Confucians, the difference between harmony and disharmony is like that between right and wrong, good and bad, and success and failure. The Wuxing 五行 section of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Strips, which is generally accepted as a Confucian text, states that "the harmony of the Five virtuous practices is called Virtue; the harmony of the Four practices is called Goodness. Goodness is the way of humanity. Virtue is the way of Heaven" (德之行五和謂之德，四行和謂之善，善，人道也。德，天道也). The Four virtuous practices are Humanity, Appropriateness, Propriety, and Wisdom (仁、義、禮、智); the Five virtuous practices include the Four plus an additional one, Sageliness (聖). The harmonious practices of these virtues are the way of humanity and the way of Heaven. They are the right way. The influential Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.E.) declared that "the greatest virtue is but harmony" (德莫大于和) and advocated using "central harmony in managing society" (以中和理天下) (Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露 "Xuntianzhidao" 循天之道). For Dong, the ability to harmonize in the world is indeed the most precious ability.

As far as the need for harmony is concerned, Confucians tend to see more consistency than distinction between the "private" and the "public" (as is seen in Western liberalism), between the political and the nonpolitical, and between human society and the natural world. When persons and things are engaged in a healthy, stable interplay and each gets its due, this is deemed harmony, and the opposite as
disharmony. When a plant is harmonized with its surroundings it thrives; when one is harmonized with one’s environment, one flourishes. The ideal of an individual is to harmonize not only with one’s own person but also with other individuals. The ideal of a society is to harmonize not only with the society but also with other societies. The human ideal is to achieve harmony not only among the members of the human community but with the rest of the cosmos as well.

A Philosophical Analysis and Exposition of He

Based on the study in the preceding section, I would like to make the following observations concerning the Confucian notion of harmony. First, harmony is a metaphysical as well as an ethical notion; it describes both how the world at large operates and how human beings ought to act. Harmony is the Way, the Confucian way. Second, harmony is by its very nature relational. It presupposes the coexistence of multiple parties: “a single item does not harmonize.” As far as harmony is concerned, these parties possess more or less equal significance. Therefore, harmony is always contextual; epistemologically it calls for a holistic approach. A mentality of harmony is a contextual mentality. In other words, persons of harmonious mentality see things, and make judgments on these things, in relation, in context, not in isolation or separation. Third, Confucian harmony, as it is sometimes understood, by no means implies “perfect agreement.” In a harmonious circumstance coexisting parties must be in some way different from one another; while harmony does not preclude sameness, sameness itself is not harmony. Harmony is different from stagnant concordance in that harmony is sustained by energy generated through the interaction of different elements in creative tension. Although harmonious social relations may involve friendliness and love, neither friendliness nor love is a necessary condition for harmony. Even unfriendly parties can coexist in harmony. This point, as I will show shortly, has implications for an appropriate understanding of the relation between harmony and strife.12

Fourth, the requirement of harmony places a constraint on each party in interaction, and, in the meantime, provides a context for each party to have optimal space to flourish. In the Confucian view, the world is there not just for one item or one kind of thing. It is there for the “myriad things.” Nothing in the world can claim absolute superiority over everything else. Parties in a harmonious relationship are both the condition for and the constraint against one another’s growth. A harmonious relationship implies mutual complement and mutual support between the parties.13 There is mutual benefit even though harmony cannot be reduced to mutual benefit.

In this section I will first articulate a Confucian view of the relation between harmony, sameness, and strife; then explore in the context of Confucian philosophy why harmony is so important to Confucians; and finally, through a comparison of Confucianism and Christianity, try to answer some questions about Confucian harmony by discussing issues regarding gaps or potential gaps between moral ideals and their implementation.
It is important that we not be too simplistic in our interpretation of the Confucian attitude toward sameness. Difference and sameness between things exist at various levels. Confucians do not advocate difference for the sake of difference, nor do they reject sameness altogether. Obviously, even though the sage-kings are said to have sought spouses from other tribes, the couples were all human beings (i.e., this was a kind of sameness). Even though one would need different instruments in order to make good music, these are still musical instruments (i.e., they constitute another kind of sameness). Indeed, some ancient Chinese texts advocate a certain kind of sameness. For instance, in the Jingfa 经法 “Sidu” 四度, from the Silk Texts of the Mawangdui Han Tombs, there is the statement, “Joining Heaven and Earth, responding to the people’s will, establishing both the civilian and military service, this is called the superior tong (sameness)” (參于天地，闔于民心，文武并立，命之曰上同). Of course, the “superior tong” 上同 is not just any kind of sameness; it is sameness at the optimal level. Confucius also advises us “not to plan together with people of different roads (pursuits)” (道不同，不相為謀) (Analects 15.39). Conversely, we should plan together with those following the same (tong) roads. Mencius praises the sage-king Shun 舜, who was “good at tong with others” (善與人同) (Mencius 2A.8). Furthermore, Zuozhuan “Chenggong” 16 成公十六年 states that “when people live in abundance, they will be together harmoniously and listen [to the ruler’s commands]” (民生敦厖，和同以聽).

The expression “being together harmoniously” combines both he 和 and tong 同. We can say that, at an appropriate level, sameness is an ingredient of harmony and, as such, must be maintained and valued. Therefore, the kind of sameness rejected by scholars both ancient and Confucian must not be understood as sameness per se, but the “over-presence of sameness,” like that between the duke and his minister Ju in the Yan Zi story. An over-presence of sameness can occur in many ways. It can be caused by a lack of diversity when diversity is called for; for example, a cook only has one kind of ingredient for a soup. It can be caused by forced sameness when sameness is sought for the sake of sameness; for example, a powerful person forces the same opinion on everyone else, or a fawning person pretends the same view as one’s superior for ulterior purposes—both undercut the conditions necessary for harmony.

For Confucians, over-presence of sameness, whether in terms of seeking spouses within the same tribe or making music with the same type of instrument, is not conducive to harmony. Even though members of a stamp-collecting club have to have a common interest at some level (i.e., they are fond of collecting stamps), collecting the same stamp (e.g., the Year of the Monkey stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office in 2004) does not necessarily make for a good stamp-collecting club; such a club will probably not last, because this kind of sameness “does not advance growth,” as Shi Bo said. In the political arena, even though laws must be crafted that treat everyone equally (a kind of sameness), making laws that overly demand uniformity is not conducive to the making of a good society. The kind of sameness that is appropriate to harmony is always a contextual matter and cannot be stated in absolute terms. Because the harmony-oriented stance takes conflict as its primary opponent,
there is a tendency to overlook the danger of the other side of the coin, namely the over-presence of sameness. Ancient scholars emphasize the difference between harmony and sameness because people often confuse them, taking mere sameness as harmony. Strictly speaking, the over-presence of sameness is a lack of harmony, and is therefore a kind of disharmony.

While emphasizing the harmonious interplay of different things, Chinese philosophers appear not to have given much attention to strife; otherwise they might have left the impression that strife is to be avoided for the sake of harmony. I contend that a certain type of strife is inherent in harmony. This point is implied in the emphasis by the ancient scholars on the difference between harmony and sameness (tong).

Harmony presupposes differences and has to be achieved through differences. Difference entails strife, at least potentially. We may say that there can be two kinds of strife between things. The first kind I call tension and cooperative opposition. Different things in a relationship have a tension between them in that they compete, at a minimum, for space and time. For instance, people at a busy train station heading in different directions may experience tension and potential conflict; they may step in one another’s way. Tension and opposition like this are obviously not harmony; they can jeopardize harmony. This happens, for instance, when the tension and opposition between busy people erupt into a stampede. Opposing parties, however, can also be brought into harmony without harming one another—for example, when people at a busy train station take turns, make room for one another, and move forward in an orderly way, even though in different directions. The transition from mere tension and opposition to harmony requires coordination or cooperation among the involved parties, either consciously or unconsciously. A panoramic view of a busy station causes one to marvel how a harmonious scene is being created by people heading in different, even opposite, directions. This kind of difference-as-tension and opposition is a precondition for harmony; without it there is mere sameness rather than harmony.

The second type of strife is more severe. It is the kind in which one force aims at destroying or eliminating the other or others. For example, a murderer kills innocent people, and wolves eat sheep. Let us call this second type antagonistic opposition. This type of strife is either disharmony by itself or a key element of disharmony. In this case, harmony is achieved through overcoming strife. This overcoming process may take one of two forms. First, it can be accomplished through the elimination of strife. We remove a serial murderer and the community is restored to harmony. However, for Confucians, elimination is not the prototypical path to harmony. For the most part, harmony can be achieved through a second form, namely by putting strife under control without elimination, by turning the second type of strife into the first type. Whereas a large population of sheep tends to increase the population of wolves, the population of wolves has to be lowered when they over-eat sheep to the extent that they cause a shortage in the food supply. Eventually, the wolves and the sheep have to strike a balance through some kind of natural “negotiation.” When harmony is achieved, the sheep provide food for the wolves while the wolves weed out the unhealthy and keep the sheep population in check.
Of course, sometimes violent disharmony is inevitable. On the individual level, the strife between a wolf and a sheep may end in elimination. When the population of wolves and the population of sheep strike a balance, some sheep and/or wolves have already been lost in the process. In cases like this, Confucians would say that strife between the two individuals serves as an instrumental step toward harmony in the long run and, on a large scale, for the world. Dong Zhongshu writes that “the system of Heaven and Earth integrates harmony and disharmony, centrality and noncentrality; these are employed in a timely way to be most effective” (天地之制也。兼和與不和，中與不中，而時用之，盡以為功) (Chunqiu fanlu “Xuntianzhidao”). Since harmony is not only a state but, more importantly, a process, disharmony is necessarily present during the process of harmonization.

In this sense, human beings can exist harmoniously with nature even though we have to consume natural resources. In order to survive, we have to eat, and therefore to eliminate lives in nature. But we can do this in a balanced way and achieve harmony with nature. Unlike the natural world, human beings have the capacity to play an active role in the promotion of harmony in the world. This capacity enables human beings to avoid unnecessary damage and harm in the attempt to achieve harmony. For instance, imposing too large a human population burden on nature may eventually lead to the destruction of human habitat, and consequently cause the reduction of the human population to a level sustainable by nature. But human beings have the power to restrain their behavior and to maintain a balance with nature before such a major catastrophe has to take place.

Confucian harmony is not pure submissiveness or absolute avoidance of conflict. In section 10 of the Zhongyong, Confucius’ disciple Zilu 子路 asks about strength. Confucius identifies two types: one is the strength of the northerners, who will fight unto death for the right cause. The southerners, on the other hand, have a different kind: they are tolerant and flexible, and they do not seek revenge against the unjust. Confucius approves of both types of strength, including the strength of “central standing without leaning to one side” (中立而不倚). This passage suggests that Confucius endorses the integration of both kinds of strength into a harmonious interplay, rather than simply taking a mean between the two. The strength of the northerners may appear extreme (a “fight unto death”), but at times this course is necessary to achieve and maintain harmony in human affairs in a larger context. Therefore, it should not be ruled out. This is why Confucius tells Zilu that “the jun zi harmonizes without mindlessly following others” (君子和而不流). To follow blindly the flow of other people is what Xunzi calls “fawning,” as opposed to “reasonably accommodating” (Xunzi “Xiushen”); this leads to an over-presence of sameness rather than long-term harmony. A harmony that deteriorates into over-presence of sameness loses internal energy; it cannot maintain itself as harmony and will ultimately require revitalization.

With this understanding, Confucian harmony is not mere agreement without difference; it is not meant to preserve peace at any cost. Harmony is harmonization; real harmony is a dynamic process. It does not rule out strife, but uses strife in order to achieve greater harmony. Harmony comes from, and is maintained through, har-
monization; it requires action. Having faith in God does not mean that Christians will not fight for their cause. Similarly, Confucians do not just sit there waiting for harmony to present itself. To the contrary, Confucians have a mission in life: to harmonize the world through a process in which a triad is formed between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. What makes Confucianism a philosophy of harmony rather than a philosophy of strife is that it takes harmony as the ultimate goal and measures the success or failure of an action by whether it contributes to greater harmony in the world.

Next, why is harmony so central to Confucianism? Admittedly, Confucianism is not the only tradition that values harmony. After all, who would not think harmony to be a good thing? My point is that, in comparison with other major world traditions, Confucianism gives harmony an importance that is not matched by most of them. Here I would like to show that the absence of a predetermined fixed order in the Confucian cosmos and the Confucian belief in the goodness of human nature are among the main reasons why harmony is so central to Confucianism.

David Hall and Roger Ames have insightfully pointed out that Confucian harmony, or *he*, marks the difference between Western “Truth-seekers” on the one hand and Chinese “Way-seekers” on the other. For Hall and Ames, “Truth-seeking” is the prototypical mode of doing philosophy in the West, while “Way-seeking” is its counterpart in China. To seek “Truth” with a capital “T” is to look for something absolute, eternal, and ultimately true—for example, Plato’s Forms. In contrast, the Chinese Way is not preset and needs to be generated through human activity. In Hall and Ames’ terminology, whereas Westerners typically follow a logical order in their interpretation of the world, the Chinese typically follow an aesthetic order. Logical order is achieved by the application of an antecedent pattern of relatedness to a given situation. Aesthetic order is achieved by the creation of novel patterns. Aesthetic order requires openness, disclosure, and flexibility. In the Chinese aesthetic order, various things have to be synthesized in order to generate a harmonious whole, such as *yin* and *yang* and the five processes (*wuxing* 五行).

In support of Hall and Ames’ interpretation, I would point out that ancient Chinese cosmology holds the belief that the world has evolved from chaos, that there is a process from no order to the generation of order, as articulated in such texts as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 "Tianwenxun" 天文訓 and later in Zhou Dunyi’s 周敦頣 *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* (太極圖說). Based on this belief, the Chinese order is fluid and open-ended; the order of *yin* and *yang*, and of the five processes, at most provides a general direction rather than a detailed road map for human action.

This Confucian understanding of an orderly world differs significantly from some other major world traditions. In Christianity, for example, God created the world with a purpose for each and every part of the creation. The will of God is carved in nature as natural law. God has set up order in the world and boundaries between all parts of the creation. Accordingly, the right way in this world is to follow God’s rules and to obey the order given by God. Unlike most major world traditions, Confucianism typically does not believe in an anthropomorphic God as creator. Consequently,
in the Confucian world there is no order or natural law from God. Without a pre-
set fixed order, the world has to generate an order of its own. Although sometimes
the Confucian Heaven (天) appears to play a role that resembles the Christian God
in some way, it is not a transcendent power, as the Christian God is. The Con-
fucian Heaven is a member of the Triad of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity (天人),
and it does not have the power to impose a predetermined order on the world
from without. Rather, as merely one member of the Triad the Confucian Heaven
needs to achieve order through coordination with the other two members, Earth
and Humanity.

For Confucians, therefore, order in the world has to be achieved through harmo-
nization. Take again the example of the populations of sheep and wolves. According
to the Confucian thinking, there is no fixed order from God about their populations.
Nature keeps a balance between the two. Ancient Confucians believed that the will
of Heaven is revealed through the people. When the ruler loses the mandate of
Heaven, it is time for the people to replace him. Perhaps the fact of the matter is
that there is no such thing as the mandate of Heaven. Rather it may be that when
the ruler is so oppressive and causes so much social disharmony that the people
can no longer put up with him, it is time to replace him with another ruler, one
who can harmonize with the people. Confucians see a harmony (not necessarily
friendliness) coming out of this continuous interplay of opposing forces. Through
such interplay various parts of the world “negotiate” with one another in order to
strike a balance, not from a predestined principle but through some kind of compro-
mise, some kind of give-and-take. It is like rocks and water in the river: both can
have their way, yet both have to yield in some way. In such a world, any order that
exists has to be an outcome of harmonization.

Elsewhere I have argued that the Chinese understanding of truth, which differs
from the Western understanding, plays an important role in Chinese social prac-
tice. The Chinese typically do not see truth as correspondence with an objective
fact in the world; rather they understand truth more as a way of being, namely being
a good person, a good father, or a good son. For them there is no objective truth
carved in stone, and consequently there is not an ultimate fixed order in the world
according to which things must operate. The Confucian Dao consists of the process
of generating an actual order in the world rather than an already fixed order. Without
a predetermined truth, human beings have to set boundaries for themselves and for
other things as they move forward in the world.

Having to choose between being too principled and being too flexible, Christian
theology is more likely than Confucian theology to risk the former, and Confucian
theology is more likely than Christian theology to risk the latter. Acting in accor-
dance with principles from God (e.g., the Ten Commandments), the Christian stands
firm, but she may misunderstand God’s mission for her (as during the Crusades). But
being principled leaves her little room for flexibility: God is always right and so are
God’s commands. Acting on the ideal of harmony, Confucians have few specifics to
go by before they themselves create the specifics, and being created by human
beings the specifics should never be taken as absolute. Thus, Confucians tend to be
less rigid, but at the same time risk being too flexible in the pursuit of harmony. It would be naive, however, to think that a happy union of the Christian and the Confucian would solve all problems; such a union carries the weakness of not being principled enough when needing to be principled and of not being flexible enough when in need of flexibility. I will elaborate on this matter in the next section.

In addition to having no predetermined fixed order in the world, another reason for Confucians to maintain their belief in harmony is that they generally have faith in the goodness of human nature. Early on in history, Mencius articulated and argued forcefully that human nature is good. His doctrine has had a long-lasting influence on the Confucian tradition. This notion orients Confucians toward looking for ways to resolve conflicts in society without eliminating one side in the conflict. This orientation is fundamentally different from that of looking to identify and eliminate “evil-doers” in the world. The primary approach to rooting out evil-doers would be to attack and destroy the enemy as effectively as possible; negotiation is merely a waste of time and opportunity. On the other hand, in order to work out differences between people where both sides are basically good, the primary approach should be to look for ways to negotiate with the other side; even though confrontation cannot always be ruled out, it should be minimized. Based on the Confucian belief in the goodness of human nature, it is readily conceivable that the world at large is not fundamentally antagonistic to human existence, because the nonhuman world, which is incapable of consciously harming others, is either benign or neutral toward humanity. Therefore, harmonization, rather than elimination, should be the primary consideration in dealing with problems in the world.

In practice, the ideal of harmony translates into a kind of pragmatic attitude. It is this attitude that makes the whole world of difference between the philosophy of harmony and the philosophy of conflict. The attitude of harmony has a strategic significance. It makes us more willing to engage in negotiation, more willing to compromise, and less willing to resort to confrontation and conquest. It enables us to take into consideration the whole picture when considering an issue and to give each party its due. It is thus more conducive to peaceful solutions to the world’s problems.

Now I would like to discuss issues related to the Confucian ideal of harmony and its implementation. First, having faith in harmony does not imply that things always harmonize. As a cherished ideal, harmony provides the guidelines as well as an account of certain cultural patterns in Confucian society. Having faith in harmony is to have faith in a world that gives everything its due and lets the myriad things flourish. However, things may not always harmonize. In Christianity, God’s will is not always followed by human beings; natural law is often violated, and not all Christians love their neighbors as they should. Similarly, in the Confucian world, harmony is not always achieved and maintained; disruptions take place and disharmony ensues, and not all Confucians cherish harmony as much as they should. A Confucian who has faith in the harmony of the world is somewhat like a Christian who has faith in God, even though God and harmony are by no means parallel. Sometimes things go terribly wrong, and yet a Christian would keep her faith that
things eventually will turn around because all is in the hands of God. Similarly, a
Confucian in trying times would believe that disharmony is temporary and that har-
mony will prevail. It is harmony as the ultimate ideal that makes the Confucian
world a meaningful world, and it is harmonization that gives Confucians a sense of
sacred mission in the world.

Second, embracing an ideal does not imply a consensus on its application. Fol-
lowing the same ideal, people may seek different ways to implement it. Christians
may not agree with one another on how they should put God’s words into practice,
even though they share a common belief in God and a common belief that one
should obey God’s will. Similarly, although Confucians take harmony as their high-
est ideal and all strive for its achievement, they may not always agree with one an-
other on how harmony is identified and how it is best achieved. It is possible that
what is called “harmony” by one person may be disguised oppression to another.
Indeed, there have been times when oppression has persisted in the name of “har-
mony,” just as oppression in the name of God has existed in the history of Christian-
ity. Obviously it is not the case that once we embrace the concept of harmony all
problems will disappear. My aim in this essay is to elucidate the Confucian concept
and ideal of harmony, not to provide a precise conception of harmony on a particu-
lar issue. Just as Christians need to figure out among themselves what God’s words
mean to them, Confucians have to translate the ideal of harmony into specific words
and actions. Nevertheless, for Confucians it is still important to promote the ideal of
harmony rather than disharmony, and to prioritize the goal of harmony, just as it is
still important to promote justice rather than injustice, even though we may not
agree on exactly what justice is in a specific case.

A Pluralist Justification for the Confucian Harmonious World

If my account of the Confucian ideal of he is correct, then Confucian harmony is by
no means an expedient tactic, or something that Confucians have to do because they
do not know better, or a consequence of resignation to powerful forces in a problem-
atic world. Harmony calls for action—and action that is proactive. The significance
of this ideal of harmony is that it provides us with a fundamental attitude toward the
world problems facing us, an attitude of determination that we must resolve conflicts
by harmonization rather than conquest. This is particularly applicable to the prob-
lems of cultural and international conflicts in our world today. How, then, can we
justify philosophically this Confucian-harmony approach to such conflicts?

I argue that this approach is justified on the ground of value pluralism, which I
define in terms of four interrelated claims: (1) There are many good values worth
pursuing in life. (2) Good values may involve tension or even conflict with one an-
other. (3) An individual as well as a culture has to configure these values into a value
system (a pattern of values) in the best way possible. (4) There is no absolute right
way to determine which configuration is the best for all peoples and all cultures;
each value configuration of a culture that has endured the test of time is justified on
its own ground. Based on these beliefs, we can draw the conclusion that the most
reasonable way to deal with conflict between different cultures is to reconcile them into harmonious coexistence.

I take the first claim to be relatively noncontroversial. Obviously, we value not only liberty but also equality, love, beauty, et cetera. After John Stuart Mill, even utilitarians, who hold that ultimately human beings pursue only pleasure and happiness, today do not deny that there is pleasure and happiness of different qualities. A utilitarian-value pluralist may hold that different individuals and cultures may value pleasure and happiness of different kinds, or at least they may assign different degrees of value to different types of pleasure and happiness. Second, good values may have tension or even conflict with one another because they point in different, sometimes even opposite, directions, as Isaiah Berlin maintains. 24 For example, there can be a conflict between loyalty and individual liberty: in order to remain loyal, one often needs to restrain one’s liberty. Good values can involve conflict also because it costs us to pursue them, in terms of either time, energy, or resources; there are tensions and conflicts between different ways of allocating time, energy, and resources for different values. We may call this kind of cost the “opportunity cost” of value pursuit. It is a kind of “loss” in pursuit of other values as we go after our chosen values. 25 The pursuit of economic efficiency often comes into conflict with social equality or with the pursuit of beauty, natural or human-made. In pursuing any value, one needs to engage in certain activities accordingly, or the pursuit of value becomes empty. Obviously, one does not have unlimited time, energy, and resources. How one allocates these things in pursuing various values reflects the importance of these values to the individual.

Third, because there are tensions and conflicts involved in these pursuits, both individuals and cultures need to configure various values into a value system by locating each value vis-à-vis other values on a kind of “value map.” In Bernard Williams’ terminology, a value concept has its “contour,” that is, its basic schema of concern and a given historical elaboration or application of it. 26 The process whereby a culture pieces the “contours” of various value concepts together into a cultural pattern I here call “value configuration.” A cultural tradition contains, among other things, a value system, which is a particular configuration of various values. Value configurations by individuals in a culture are usually influenced by and reflect the value configuration of the culture. The configuration of a particular value system is usually a result of a long historical process, including both conscious and unconscious effort. Such a process involves numerous factors, including a particular physical environment, general assumptions concerning the operation of the universe, specific existing social arrangements, the influence of charismatic leaders, and special historical events. 27

As a form of communitarianism, Confucianism does not believe that a stable, healthy society is possible without a societal configuration of values, even though there may be more than one such configuration in the same society (e.g., Confucianism and Daoism). Such a configuration includes balancing values that are in tension with one another. For example, there is some tension between being principled and being flexible. Usually a value system incorporates both values. However, one value
system may not give each the same weight as another value system does. I believe that Christians and Confucians, although both endorse similar values, give different weight to them. The Christian tends to be more principled than the Confucian, and the Confucian tends to be more flexible than the Christian. If we look at various value systems throughout the world, most of them share similar values in generic, if not specific, terms, such as respect and respect for parents, and love and loving one’s neighbors.28

The difference between these value systems lies in their respective configurations of these values. Take again the example of Confucianism and Christianity. It is not that Christians do not value respect for parents. 29 They certainly do. But they also believe that revering God is far more important than respecting and caring for parents.30 It is not that Confucians do not value the authority of Heaven. They do. It is just that they feel, more than Christians do, that parents are deserving of respect. It is not that Christians do not value harmony and flexibility. They do. It is rather that they believe, more than Confucians do, that one should be principled. It is not that Confucians do not value being principled. They do. It is rather that Confucians value flexibility and harmony more than Christians do. Besides making use of different symbolisms to manifest similar values, a Confucian lives by a value system that is configured differently from the Christian value system, and vice versa. This is not to say that all Confucians (or Christians) live by exactly the same value configuration. Within each value system there are always “conservatives” and “liberals.” But these are relative terms, and these people are “conservatives” and “liberals” within the same value system. A “conservative” in one value system may be seen as “liberal” in another value system, and vice versa.

Fourth, although people generally agree that there should be a good balance between various competing values, they may disagree on what such a good balance is. This kind of disagreement is reflected in different configurations in various value systems. It is my belief that, among all the world traditions, there is no single absolutely correct configuration of values.31 In theory, there can be extremely unbalanced value configurations. For example, we can imagine that a certain value system wants only individual liberty and leaves no room for equality. However, such a value system is not likely to last, because it is unlikely to have long-term followers. Therefore, through a sort of “natural selection,” all viable value systems maintain a certain kind of balance between competing values. In contrast to possible extreme cases, all viable value systems are more or less located toward the middle of a wide spectrum of possible value configurations. This is one reason why Charles Taylor is right when he maintains that we should approach the study of any other culture with the presumption that “all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings.”32 In this sense, one can say that all value configurations in these human cultures are more or less harmonies of values. My concern in this section, however, is not so much with harmony within a value configuration as with harmony between different value configurations. My concern is to provide a justification for
why cultures with different value configurations can and should harmonize with one another.

My position can be labeled as “moral relativity without relativism.” That is to say, while moral values are not groundless—that is, not “everything goes”—there is no single standard to determine what kind of balance of values is the best. One reason for this is that value configurations take place in specific historic contexts. A culture in an environment with an abundant food supply but under constant threat of external invasion is likely to configure its value system differently from one in an environment of food scarcity with no external threat. There is no single value configuration that suits all historical contexts.

Another reason why there is no “best” balance of various values is that specific situations always vary, and our value-based decisions in response to particular situations are often like guesswork. There is no single configuration of values that leads us consistently to the right course of action. Let us look at a case in which a wife finds her husband starting to be alcoholic and abusive. One option for the woman is to stay in the marriage and try to salvage it by helping her husband change for the better; another option is a quick divorce. She is likely to hear different voices in herself. One voice comes from such moral values as commitment, relationship, family responsibility to their children, and love. Another voice may come from values such as independence, autonomy, liberty, and safety. These voices tend to pull her in opposite directions. If she listens to the first voice, she will stay in the marriage, at least for a while. It may turn out that she successfully helps her husband reform himself, and, consequently, the couple may live together happily ever after. Or it may be just a waste of the woman’s time; she may end up suffering a lot more and missing major opportunities for a better life. Listening to the second voice, she may get away from her abusive husband and start a new and better life. Or she may lose the chance to save an otherwise perfectly salvageable marriage and may cause tremendous hardship and pain for her children. In reality, most people would need to make a decision somewhere between being too early and too late. So, then, to which voice should one listen more closely?

Because different value systems may configure these values differently, two persons of the same situation in different cultures may be influenced by different value configurations. One value system may give the first voice a larger volume, while another system the second. I maintain that, because of uncertainties in life and uncontrollable variables in moral decisions, there is no perfect formula or configuration of values for the woman to follow. Suppose she is at the midpoint between being too early and being too late. Different value systems may call for different actions. Which of the competing voices should she listen to? While a “liberal” value configuration would likely say that she should listen to the second voice and get out of the marriage, a “conservative” value configuration would say that she should listen to the first voice and give the marriage another chance. Which voice is right? Unfortunately, the matter cannot be resolved by any specific ethical formula, Plato’s technē, or some utilitarian calculus. I would say that the outcome is often determined more by luck than by the legitimacy or superiority of a particular value configuration. Let
me say that the matter here is not only one of a more desirable outcome; it is also one of getting things right. In other words, one does not have to depend on a utilitarian presupposition of the moral good in order to deliberate on whether the woman should or should not seek a divorce from her abusive husband. In cases like this one, a good solution is sometimes a value system that heavily prioritizes individual liberty and sometimes one that heavily prioritizes family commitment, as Confucianism does. Both types of value configuration have their own strengths and weaknesses. Each carries its own legitimacy.

Based on this version of value pluralism, the Confucian maintains that the harmony model should be used in solving conflicts between cultures in today’s world. In the harmony model, when cultures conflict, the best way to handle conflict is not to protect one’s own ground and try to eliminate the opponent; it is to find a way to work out an arrangement that allows oneself as well as one’s opponent to adjust, rather than simply to eliminate one’s opponent. Through mutual adjustment and mutual accommodation we reshape the situation into a harmonious one. 33

Needless to say, this harmony model is in sharp contrast to Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” model. I think that Huntington is right in seeing conflicts between civilizations. As a matter of fact, I believe there is conflict of various degrees between all value systems. The question is whether “clashing” is the solution or inevitable outcome of this kind of conflict. 34 To be sure, there have been and will continue to be “clashes” between different value systems, and, furthermore, “clashes” sometimes “solve” the problem by eliminating the opponents. However, when the wolves “clash” with the sheep, the wolves lose their supply of food; when water in a river “clashes” with the rocks by pushing them away, it also loses its bed and its path. Moreover, usually after a successful clash with an opponent, a new opponent emerges, and the same problem persists. The Confucian harmony model provides a solution with more stability and less cost to humanity. It aims not at clashing with the opponent but at harmonious coexistence through mutual change and mutual adjustment, like water and rocks in the river.

It may be asked how you are supposed to promote harmony when your enemy is attacking you. Isn’t the Confucian ideal of harmony in this instance mere naiveté? The Confucian would respond as follows: when your enemy is attacking you, you need to protect yourself; if he slaps your right cheek, you should not give him your left. Harmonization requires action and resolve to overcome disharmonious elements in the world. However, you must understand that in the long run, the best life is one that is lived in harmony and peace. Therefore, you should avoid doing extreme things that create or perpetuate your enemy, and even when you engage in fighting with your enemy, you should try to turn conflict into harmony. In other words, one should maintain a harmony mentality rather than the combatant mentality. The Zhouli “Dongguan” states that “harmony results in peace” (和则安). Peace cannot be obtained and maintained without harmony. Temporary peace through oppression and suppression is not real peace, and it does not last. In order to achieve real peace and to maintain peace throughout the world, we would do well to learn from the Confucian ideal of harmony.
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2 – See 辭源 (Sources of terms) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1995), p. 117.

3 – Chinese in ancient times used a five-tone musical scale.

4 – Another source of the early meaning of he is 盤, which means the mixing of wine with water.

5 – I here translate ji 继 as “advance growth.” See Analects 6.3: “The superior person helps those in an emergency but does not advance the cause of the rich” (君子周急不继富).

6 – Literally it reads “a single thing” or “a single item.” In his commentary on the Zhouli “Chunguan” 春官, “Baozhangshi” 保章氏, Zheng Xuan writes, “Wu means color” (Wu se ye 物·色也).

7 – Jiang 講 literally means “making peace” or “negotiating peace.” See the Zhan-guoce 戰國策, “Xizhouce” 西周策: “Qin did not make peace with Wei” (秦未與魏講也).

8 – Unlike the Zuozhuan, the Guoyu is not one of the Confucian Thirteen Classics. But it has been attributed to the same author as the Zuozhuan and has a similar philosophical orientation.

9 – Besides li 禮, he is also closely related to other key Confucian concepts such as li 理, ren 仁, and yi 義. Space does not allow the inclusion of these concepts in relation to he in the present essay.

10 – When the state of Qi attacked Liu Xiahui’s native state of Lu in 634 B.C.E., Liu sent people off to persuade the ruler of Qi “not to harm one another.”

12 – On this subject, see, for example, Shu-hsien Liu and Robert E. Allinson, Harmony and Strife: Contemporary Perspectives, East and West (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988).


14 – For similar uses of “tong” 同 and “not tong” 不同 by Mencius, see Mencius 2A:2 and 4B:29, 31, 32.

15 – Hegel writes, “Difference as such is already implicitly contradiction; for it is the unity of sides which are, only in so far as they are not one—and it is the separation of sides which are, only as separated in the same relation” (Science of Logic, § 934). Stephen Houlgate, ed., The Hegel Reader (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), p. 235.

16 – Obviously, since human beings can affect the quality of the balance between the two populations, so can other species.

17 – Perhaps with the exception of Daoism.

18 – David Hall and Roger Ames, Thinking from the Han (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 180. Obviously, not all Westerners are “Truth-seekers” and not all Chinese are “Way-seekers.” But to the extent that these two patterns are the predominant tendencies, respectively, I believe that Hall and Ames are right.

19 – Ibid., p. 16.

20 – Some people may think otherwise. Here I follow Hall and Ames’ interpretation (ibid.). Perhaps we should distinguish between popular Chinese beliefs and Confucian theology here. The average person may believe that Heaven is a fixed entity and that Heaven has set a predetermined order in the world. Confucian theology, as delineated in such texts as the Zhongyong and the Yijing, clearly offers a different view.


22 – This is not to say that a Confucian may not be as stubborn as a Christian on one’s commitment to a particular moral ideal. But the typical Confucian has less faith in an objective Platonic moral order set in the universe than the typical Christian, and therefore the Confucian’s fundamental moral principles are less clearly cut. In this regard, the Confucian probably stands at the midpoint between the “water-like” Daoist and the “righteous” Christian.
23 – Strictly speaking, the belief in harmony predates the formation of the theory of the goodness of human nature. Thus, the theory did not cause Confucians to believe in harmony, but reinforced such a belief.


26 – Ibid.

27 – Obviously, the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, have had an impact on how people in the United States balance their values of individual liberty and public security.

28 – This is supported by empirical data generated through such studies as the World Value Survey at the University of Michigan. This phenomenon may be due to the fact that we human beings have gone through a similar evolutionary process for our basic needs (e.g., Martha Nussbaum’s basic capacity argument). A further exploration of this kind of value universalism is beyond the scope of this essay.

29 – The fifth of the Ten Commandments says, “Honor your father and your mother.”

30 – Jesus said, “No one is worthy of me who cares more for [their] father or mother than for me” (Matthew 10:37).

31 – Consequently, we are not approaching the “end of history,” the point when all societies embrace the same configuration of value.


33 – One of the best examples of harmony between value configurations is that between Confucianism and Daoism. See Li, *The Tao Encounters the West*, chap. 6.
