

Conflict and Harmony in Comparative Philosophy

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*Selected Works from the 2013
Joint Meeting of the Society
for Asian and Comparative
Philosophy and the Australasian
Society for Asian and
Comparative Philosophy*

Edited by

Aaron B. Creller

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of harmony and conflict is representative of the allure of comparative philosophy. On the one hand, these two concepts appear to cross many, if not all, cultural boundaries. From the perspective of a “western” tradition steeped in Greek-derived meaning, these terms suggest universal conditions of struggle and balance. A commonality such as this might be naively taken as more important than any differences, thus contributing to one’s assumption that harmony and conflict are necessary categories. On the other hand, the differences between approaches to harmony, conflict, or their relationship to one another reveal broader differences between philosophical traditions. These differences often take the form of evoking contrasting sets of conceptual frameworks, standards of good thinking, and metaphorical associations. However, taken to an extreme, focusing on differences to the exclusion of any similarity leads to problems of incommensurability, which undermines comparative methodology itself.

Operating between—or perhaps simultaneously in—these two modes is what makes comparative philosophy so special. This collection of papers from the 2013 Joint Meeting of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy and the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy is a sampling of this process. Representing only a portion of the papers delivered at this conference, the selections in this volume range across a variety of time periods, traditions, and philosophical methodologies.

To organize such a variety, the selections have been arranged into three parts. In the first part, “Harmony and the Past,” the selections articulate basic historical and cultural approaches to harmony and conflict. The first two chapters examine Vedic, Greek-Heideggerian, and Zhuangzian approaches to harmony. In “Vedic View of Cosmic Harmony,” Shashi Prabha Kumar examines the connection between the embodied and the cosmic senses of harmony and conflict within the context of the Veda. Steven Burik’s essay, “*Polemos* and *Dao*,” explores the similarities and differences between Heidegger’s approach to harmony and conflict through Greek sources and the Zhuangzi. The third and fourth essays discuss conflict and classical Chinese philosophy. Sarah Mattice explores the conflicts within philosophy related to the metaphors that philosophers

make use of in “‘Interrogating’ Comparative Philosophy,” where she argues that the classical Chinese philosophical context did not make use of such combat-oriented metaphors, unlike the early Greeks. Chow Lee Tat’s essay, “Musicality in Ritual,” looks to interpretations of music in the Zhongyong, examining the problems associated with reading the text through a theistic lens. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, Aaron B. Creller examines the political implications of the tensions between Aristotle’s *epistēmē* and *technē*, while trying to find a possible way of harmonizing the hierarchical tension between the two with resources from the Zhuangzi, in the essay “Harmonizing Knowledge.”

In the second part, “Harmony and Conflict Embodied,” all of the selections touch on the embodiment of harmony and conflict, especially in the form of emotions and physicality. In “Embodied Emotions of Embodied Mind: The Chan Notion of Freedom,” Ellen Zhang examines the tension in Buddhist approaches to non-attachment as the cutting off of thinking and feeling, while at the same time incorporating emotion as part of enlightenment. She resolves this tension by examining Chan Buddhism’s non-dualistic approach to feeling and thinking as embodied-emotions, comparing such an approach with similar trends in phenomenology and existentialism. Eva Kit Wah Man examines the complexity of emotion through a comparison of Robert Solomon’s work and the Mencius in “Reflections on Robert Solomon’s Ideation of Emotion and Mencius’ Moral Cultivation of ‘Embodied Emotion’.” The eighth essay, “Whistling to Summon Spirits: Daoist Attempts to Whistle What ‘Cannot be Said’” by Marthe Chandler, involves the connection between the Daoist practice of whistling and embodiment within a qi cosmology.

In the final part, “Harmony in Politics,” each selection considers the importance of harmony and conflict in the political realm. In Chapter Nine, “‘Confucian Cultural Fallacy’ in the 20th Century Chinese Enlightenment Movement,” WEN Haiming examines the connection between culture and historical determination, especially as it relates to the political sphere in contemporary China. Joshua Mason continues the consideration of Chinese politics in his examination of the conditions that create harmony and strife in society in his piece, “Between Chaos and Vagueness: The Extremes that Threaten Harmonious Society.” Chapter Eleven examines the tensions surrounding rights in Benedict S. B. Chan’s “Do Economic Rights Conflict with Political Rights? An East West Cultural Debate.” In the final chapter, Tony See discusses the connection between the politics of World War II Japan and the philosophical stance of Buddhism in “Nichiren and War.”

PART I:
HARMONY AND THE PAST

CHAPTER ONE

VEDIC VIEW OF COSMIC HARMONY: PARITY BETWEEN MICROCOSM (*PIN̄DA*) AND MACROCOSM (*BRAHMĀN̄DA*)

SHASHI PRABHA KUMAR

Mankind today is passing through a critical phase where all aspects of the universe seem to be in a mode of conflict and the quest for harmony is greater than ever. It is in this background that the profound Vedic vision can offer fresh insights into future possibilities. This exposition is a modest attempt in the same direction.

I

The present paper intends to explore and expound the Vedic idea of inherent synergy between the gross (embodied) and subtle (disembodied) levels of existence. The scope of this exposition is mainly restricted to the original Vedic sources, i.e. the four Vedic Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads.¹

II

The Veda is the most ancient available literary document of mankind and it proclaims that life is a divine opportunity.² It exhorts all human beings as the sons of immortality and enunciates that there is complete coordination among all aspects of existence in the universe.³ The Vedic principle of *ṛta*⁴ represents the sublime inviolable moral regularity of the cosmos as also being the inner harmony and order of a man's conduct.⁵ Accordingly, it signifies that there is a parallelism between the embodied human being and the disembodied cosmic existence. The same is suggested by an oft-quoted (but anonymous) dictum of Vedic interpretation, that the human body is a micro model of the macrocosm: *yat pin̄de tat brahmāṇde*.

It needs to be noted here that the word “*piṇḍa*” means “body” and “*brahmāṇḍa*” stands for “the cosmos”: “In Sanskrit religio-philosophical literature, *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa* are used as a pair to speak of everything from an individual to all the creation around him.”⁶

It means that just as the human body is an abode of the individual self, similarly the entire cosmos is the abode of the Supreme Self.

The earth is whose base (foot or prama), the midspace
whose belly, and who has made the sky his head, to him,
the Eldest Lord supreme, let our homage be.⁷

From this point of view, anyone who aims to resolve all sorts of conflicts and attain harmony has to begin with the immediate rather than the mediate, the proximate rather than the remote, and the visible rather than the invisible.⁸ There is no doubt about the fact that the most immediate reality for everyone is one’s own personal experience, and the real conflict is also not with others, but with oneself. This is so because the seeds of conflict or amity are actually rooted in the mind of the individual and if the mind is attuned in such a manner that there is no intra-personal disturbance then inter-personal disputes will automatically be dissolved. Consequently, a harmonious complementarity between bipolar opposites such as untruth and truth, darkness and light, mortality and immortality will also be accomplished. In other words, if we aspire to achieve global peace, then first we have to be at peace within ourselves.

III

It is in this background that the Vedic view propounds a complete, cohesive philosophy of life in which the body, mind and sense organs of a person are all working in complete cooperation for healthy and happy living. Vedic Samhitas abound in such prayers where not only physical health is aspired toward, but mental strength and spiritual power is also sought as follows:

Whatever distressing lacuna I have in my vision, in my
heart or in my thought, may the Lord Supreme remove that.
May gracious to us be He, who is the Lord of the whole universe.⁹

It must be reiterated that to accomplish this goal of perfect harmony, one has to begin with oneself, i.e. to control and contain negative emotions such as anger, greed, hate and jealousy, as is manifested in the following Vedic prayers:

May I never be swayed by (my weak impulses like) aversion.¹⁰

Let no one so ever hate us.¹¹

On the other hand, positive feelings such as universal empathy, global concord and cosmic goodwill need to be strengthened, as is expressed in the following Vedic verses:

May there be proper understanding with
our own people, proper understanding with strangers;
O twins divine (Aśvinau), may both of you develop
proper understanding among us here.¹²

I hereby bring about unity of your hearts and unity of
minds, free from malice. May each one of you love
the other as a cow loves its new-born calf.¹³

Let my mind be always enlivened by noble
and righteous resolves.¹⁴

It is also noteworthy here that the Vedic view is not prescriptive; it does not enjoin one to act in a certain way, rather it directs one towards self-motivation and exhorts to first elevate oneself through auto-suggestions like the following, and then to seek divine help for the same:

O evil thought, go far away, why do you suggest abominable things. Get away!¹⁵

Whoever, our hostile kin or an outsider, wants to destroy us,
May all the Devas discomfit him!¹⁶

IV

There is no denying the fact that universal conflict between evil and good, ignoble and noble is eternal. There are several depictions of this constant struggle¹⁷ in the Vedic literature which narrates it in the form of a battle between divine and demonic forces (*devasura-saṅgrāma*).¹⁸ But actually this struggle is only metaphorical in the sense that there is an inner essence to the literal depiction; it emphasises the supremacy of right over wrong, light over darkness and immortal spirit over mortal physicality.¹⁹

More importantly, this tussle is not only in the outer physical world, but also in the inner mental space of every human being, so the Vedas propose an optimistic outlook according to which truth always prevails

over falsity and light over darkness; that is why an alert human being crosses over from untruth towards truth²⁰ and there is always a transition from darkness to light:

Darkness is replaced with the luster of light.²¹

It is this positive message of the Vedic sources which can guide humanity in its search for holistic development and also provide an everlasting link between both realms: personal as well as global. Therefore, the well-known Vedic prayer for cosmic peace actually culminates in an explorative journey of self-enrichment:

May the sky be peaceful; may the mid-space be peaceful;
 may the earth be peaceful; may the waters be peaceful;
 may the annual plants be peaceful; may the forests be peaceful;
 may all the bounties of Nature be peaceful;
 may the knowledge be peaceful;
 may all the things be peaceful; may there be peace and peace only;
may such a peace come to me!²²

The ultimate phrase of this prayer, “may that peace come to me which is pervading the whole cosmos,” is actually the clue for the resolution of all inner conflicts. It means that there can be peace throughout the external world, provided that there is peace within one’s own heart, since no idea of harmony can be actualized if one is mentally disturbed.

According to the Vedic view, a human is the most fortunate of beings, who, in spite of possessing several animal instincts, can overcome all of these and transform himself totally, so much so that his ascent and upliftment can take him to the level of divinity.²³ In a Ṛgvedic verse, it is desirable for six such embodied animal instincts to be thwarted:

O Lord of resplendence, destroy the evil feelings, whether these come in the fiendish garb of an owl, or of an owlet, or of a dog, or of a wolf, or of a falcon or of a vulture.²⁴

These six negative attitudes respectively symbolize six creatures other than human beings as follows:

darkness	←→	owl
anger	←→	owlet
jealousy	←→	dog
lust	←→	wolf

pride	←→	falcon
greed	←→	vulture

Significantly, it is implied herein that such degrading inner instincts are more harmful than external enemies, because these endanger the saner aspect of humanity. At the same time, it is only given to human beings that they can first distinguish between good and evil, and then overcome the latter by strengthening the former.

So, it is envisaged in Vedic sources that the finest formula for resolving a conflict between vice and virtue begins within each one of us; those who know their immortal inner being, they are truly the knowledgeable ones, because only they are capable of realising the essence of Supreme global power:

They who recognize the Lord Supreme in Puruṣa (the embodied man),
they know the Parameṣṭhi (the Lord of the highest abode).
He, who knows the Parameṣṭhi and he who knows the creator (Prajāpati);
Those who know the eldest Lord Supreme (Jyeṣṭha Brahma),
they come to know the Skambha (the support of the universe).²⁵

V

As already mentioned, the human body is held to be the microcosm and is said to be the sacred substratum of the immortal spirit in the Vedic view. It is said to be the most coveted creation of the divine:

Having fused the mortal man complete, the divine forces
entered the human form.²⁶

For all deities are dwelling within (the human body), as cows stay
in a cow-stall.²⁷

The human body is ordained first and foremost as the means for fulfilling one's obligations²⁸ to oneself, to one's family and to society at large; it is held to be the most superior model of complementarity and coordination among its different parts. It is therefore held to be a sacred dwelling for different divine faculties:

With eight circles and nine gates or portals impregnable
is the castle of the enlightened ones.
Therein lies the golden chest, conductor to the
world of bliss-encompassed by brilliant light.²⁹

In another Vedic verse, it is stated that thirty-three gods have entered the human body, just as these divine forces have formed the cosmic abode of the Supreme Self.³⁰ Therefore, he who knows this body (*pinḍa*), verily knows the cosmos (*brahmāṇḍa*).

The significance of the human body in the Vedic tradition is beautifully delineated in a narrative of the Aitareya Upaniṣad, as follows:

When the creator was requested by the gods to provide them with an abode through which they could enjoy food, etc., he first brought a cow's body before the divine forces to inhabit, and they disapproved of it. Thereafter, he brought the body of a horse, but the divinities did not like it [either]. Finally the lord brought [a] human body and they all shouted happily: This is perfect, this is good. Then he asked all the divine forces to enter different parts of the human body.

Fire, becoming speech, entered the mouth. Air, becoming breath, entered the nostrils. Sun, becoming sight, entered the eyes. Directions, becoming sound, entered the hearing organ. Herbs and plants, becoming hair, entered the skin. Moon, becoming mind, entered the heart. Death, becoming exhalation (*apāna*), entered the navel. Water, becoming semen, entered the generative organ.³¹

Therefore, the human body represents the whole cosmos; it needs to be respected and cared for, but only as a means to the ultimate goal of self-realization and not only as an end in itself. The value of the mortal human body lies in the fact that it is an abode of the immortal self. The same is succinctly stated in the Kāṭha Upaniṣad as follows:

Know this Self to be the rider, **the body to be the chariot**,
the intellect to be the charioteer and the mind to be reins.

The senses are the horses, and the sense objects are the
path on which they run. One who is united with the self,
the sense and the mind is called the enjoyer.³²

The Veda proclaims that human life is a rare gift, wherein all of the three regions of the cosmos are represented: the highest or uppermost part of human body is in fact the parallel of the celestial sphere; the middle portion symbolizes the midspace, while the lower part indicates the terrestrial earth. Anyone who realizes the spiritual secret of this splendor bestowed upon him in the form of the human body will not only be enabled to live a life of harmony amongst all the parts of it, but will also

experience amity amidst the variety of existence within oneself; this sentiment is echoed in the following proclamation of the Yajurveda:

O Man! I lay heaven and earth within you,
I lay midspace in you. Live the life of amity
and harmony amidst the bounties of Nature.
Help the needy, show cordiality even to those
who envy you.³³

VI

In accordance with the above, the Vedic view propounds that once the individual is at peace with himself, he can proceed on the path of happiness for others around him. The first significant outcome of this positive attitude is genuine gender equality; the seemingly eternal conflict between male and female is not real in the Vedic view, because both male and female are considered to be twin aspects of the same reality. As per Vedic cosmogony, the Supreme Being divided himself in two equal halves at the beginning of creation.³⁴

Needless to say, one of the most disturbing problems of human existence today is the widely prevalent gender conflict. So, the Vedic idea of perfect parity between male and female is an important source in the direction of cosmic harmony.³⁵ According to Vedic delineation, there is complete equality between both the sexes; neither is the better or worse half—they are just two equal halves of the same substance.³⁶ This is more eloquently expressed in the Vedic marriage ceremony wherein a perfect companionship between the husband and wife is solicited, so much so that they are said to act like a single unit; that is why both of them are designated as *dampati*³⁷ (two owners of the house) after marriage. In fact, marriage in the Vedic view is said to be an inseparable bond which is undertaken to accomplish all the religious duties together for the welfare of the family and society, and ultimately for the fulfillment of a higher goal in life, i.e. *dharma* (obligation). It is not without reason, then, that the wife is stated to be *dharmapatnī* (lawful partner in sacred rituals, since she occupies a more exalted status in the familial role), while the husband is held to be merely a *grhapati* (householder).³⁸

VII

This brings us to the point of pleasure and good, desired and the desirable, i.e. *preyas* and *śreyas*, to use the Vedic terms. The Vedic view does not deplore enjoying the physical pleasures of life, but exhorts

humanity to practice restraint in every field of life; this restrained and regulated conduct at both micro and macro levels is expressed through the terms *ṛta* and *satya* in Vedic philosophy. Accordingly, *ṛta* represents cosmic order at the global level while *satya* suggests moral strength at the individual level; both of these principles are stated as originating from the blazing *tapas*³⁹ (spiritual fire, purifying and refining human nature⁴⁰) of the Supreme. It is re-affirmed in the Atharvaveda that *ṛta*, *satya*, *tapas* and many more such values are lodged in the different limbs of the Supreme Being (*skambha*):

In which part of him the austerities (*tapas*) abide;
in which part of him the eternal law (*ṛta*) is laid;
where the vow (*vrata*); in which part of him resides
the faith (*śraddhā*); in which part of him is the
truth (*satya*) well established.⁴¹

There is no doubt about the fact that the contemporary consumeristic attitude has taken us to an alarming level of ecological imbalance while the Vedic view propounds a balance between indulgence (*bhoga*) and abstinence (*tyāga*)⁴² so that there is harmony between the external Nature as well as the internal nature:

Enjoy it, knowing full well that it will have to be renounced.
Do not be greedy. To whom do the riches belong?

This fine formula for enjoying the bounties of Nature without harming or exploiting the ecosphere is another aspect of the Vedic view, complementary to cosmic harmony which is expressed in Vedic prayers such as the following one addressed to mother earth:

Whatever I dig from thee, O Mother Earth,
May it have quick growth again; Purifier,
May we not injure thy vitals or thy heart!⁴³

Here earth is depicted as a personified form of all the natural resources which actually symbolize cosmic existence. But the emotional bond between a human being and the earth is worth emulating. The Vedic view propounds a complete communion between man and Nature; the external as well as the internal space have to work in unison because all forms of existence are intertwined in an integral relationship.

It means that human beings across cultures should not only strive for the conservation of natural resources, but should also have a genuine concern and practice a sense of respect towards them. In fact, the totality

of an inclusive view is much more relevant for cosmic harmony than the fragmented approach being adopted today. The traditional Vedic view in this regard is that the management of natural resources has to be based on inter-generational equity which is inherent in the Indian notion of three debts, i.e. *ṛnatraya*.⁴⁴ The same is very beautifully described by a contemporary thinker in the following words: “We have not inherited the land from our ancestors, we have borrowed it from our children.”⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that empathy for fellow beings is the cornerstone of cosmic harmony, so the Vedic view aspires that:

May one person protect the other.⁴⁶

According to Vedic philosophy, this type of feeling has to be inculcated by one and all, since the whole universe is just a single dwelling for all its inhabitants:

All this world is in fact the common nest.⁴⁷

Therefore, Vedic prayers like the following ones for a disease-free and healthy existence of all the residents of this universe are only natural:

All beings around us are nourished and
become exempt from disease.⁴⁸

May all the living beings of this world be
free from diseases and be hale and hearty.⁴⁹

The Veda in fact even goes beyond empathy among human beings and envisages sympathy and friendship for each and every being of the cosmos:

May all the beings look at me with [a] friendly eye.
Thus may we all be looked at with a friendly eye.⁵⁰

Among those, whom I see and those,
whom I do not see, may you cultivate
friendship for me.⁵¹

It is in this background that the welfare of bipeds as well as quadrupeds is desired in several places in the Vedas:

Be the bringer of prosperity to our bipeds and quadrupeds.⁵²

May you grant happiness to our progeny and safety to our cattle.⁵³

VIII

What follows from the above is that the Vedic view emphasizes an underlying unity of the entire cosmos; all the living and non-living beings are in fact various reflections of the same Supreme Reality which has manifested itself in many forms:

One is that which manifests in all.⁵⁴

In every figure of his creation, the resplendent Lord has been a model.⁵⁵

Therefore, he who sees divinity in all the manifested forms of the cosmos has to respect each and every entity thereof.

Another aspect of mutual care and concern in the Vedic view is expressed through the principle of sacrifice (*yajña*) which is a key concept for cosmic harmony. The principle of *yajña* also operates at both levels: the individual as well as the global. The individual *yajña* is an internal process wherein the human body itself is the altar, while speech, sight, vitality and mind are the various priests.⁵⁶ At the cosmic level, *yajña* is being performed by several forces of Nature like the Sun, fire, air, water, earth and sky, etc. A sense of genuine gratitude towards all of these natural forces impels one to offer his best for them, so that they too shower their choicest blessings on mankind in return. This reciprocal gesture known as “*yajña*” in the Vedic tradition is the secret to ecological balance and spiritual satisfaction. The universe is created, sustained and destroyed through the cosmic principle of *yajña*. That is why the Vedas proclaim “*yajña*” to be the best of actions⁵⁷ which is said to be the fulfiller of all desires. Accordingly, each householder is supposed to observe five types of daily *yajñas* through which the supreme knowledge (*brahmayajña*), divine forces (*devayajña*), ancestors including one’s parents (*pitryajña*), fellow human beings and guests (*nryajña* or *atithiyajña*) as well as all other living beings (*bhūtayajña*) are propitiated.⁵⁸

IX

Another significant concept of Vedic philosophy is the triple interpretation of all its verses, namely spiritual (*ādhyātmika*), atmospheric (*ādhidāivika*) and material (*ādhibhautika*). It implies that there is an inherent amity amongst the grossly physical, the supra-physical or the middle, and last but not least, the subtle spiritual level. Accordingly, whatever takes place within oneself is known as *adhyātama*,⁵⁹ i.e. the self, mind, sense organs and vital air, etc., which dwell within the body, are

included in this category. But the same divine forces, which are earlier interpreted as *adhyātma*, can also be explained as *adhidaivata* when they are pervading the external physical world. So the Sun, moon, air, planets, sky, etc., are all *adhidaivata* in nature.⁶⁰ The third term, *adhibhūta*, denotes all other living beings, who represent these divine forces at the gross material level.⁶¹ For example, fire can be interpreted in the three ways as follows:

- (i) from the *adhyātma* point of view, it is speech within the body
- (ii) at the *adhidaivata* level, it is the subtle, deified fire as well as the physical and visible fire which burns
- (iii) from the *adhibhūta* aspect, it represents the embodied speaker⁶²

This provides an integral insight into the comprehensive vision of the Vedas and also paves a path for a broader understanding of the text within its proper context.

X

To sum up, it may be said that the Vedic philosophy presents a holistic vision of the universe in which the individual as well as global realms are held to be two ends of the same single thread. From this point of view, there is an essential unity between the two levels of existence, since an embodied individual being is held to be the micro model of the disembodied macro-cosmic universe. Accordingly, whatever takes place at the personal level does definitely affect universal existence. Therefore each one of us is potentially capable as well as morally responsible for our own individual state of being and also for the world around us. Let us conclude, then, by the following the Vedic verse wherein universal goodness is sought:

O Gods! May we listen with our ears to what is good,
and, O Holy Ones! See with our eyes what is good;
and may we, with firm limbs and bodies,
offering praise-songs to you,
enjoy the divinely ordained term of life.⁶³

CHAPTER TWO

POLEMOS AND DAO: CONFLICT AND HARMONY IN HEIDEGGER AND ZHUANGZI

STEVEN BURIK

Introduction

Using Heidegger's reinterpretation of Heraclitus and the philosophical Daoism of Zhuangzi, this article argues for a reinterpretation of notions of conflict and harmony in the two thinkers. I start with an exposition of how Heidegger understands ideas of strife and confrontation in ways fundamentally different from the usual, giving such notions a new interpretation. Accordingly, Heidegger also understands the ancient Greek notions of *logos* and *polemos* in radically different ways from their "normal" or "traditional" meanings, attaching great importance to both terms in a rereading of Heraclitus. I then proceed to analyse Zhuangzi's ideas connected to harmony and tie those to his understanding of the world in terms of opposing yet complementary forces, and argue how a comparison of both thinkers can show us a new understanding of the ideas of difference, conflict, and harmony. It will be shown that harmony in Zhuangzi is not to be understood as a dialectical resolution to conflict, but more as a way of situating oneself within the different forces, entailing a certain form of response to conflict and diversity. As such, this article should also be seen as an attempt to reread the notion of harmony with a view to its place in the wider correlative or relational focus that is a feature of Daoist thought.

Heidegger's thoughts will be employed to show an approach to difference that is opposed to a Hegelian resolution or sublimation of the difference. Instead, Heidegger shows how difference is not to be overcome, but to be acknowledged as fundamental to being. This reading is then compared to Zhuangzi's thoughts about harmony. Although the

focus is on Zhuangzi, I will at certain points illustrate my interpretation by pointing to relevant passages from the *Daodejing*.

I shall counter the idea that conflict and harmony are opposites, but will present them as being the same. This “sameness” translates Heidegger’s *das Selbe*, and should not be seen as identity, but rather in terms of difference, and of *logos* as the gathering of what is originary the same. I will argue in my interpretation of Heidegger and Zhuangzi that both thinkers seek to engage diversity, struggle, harmony, and conflict in a most rigorous manner.

Heidegger on Strife and the In-Between

Heidegger has throughout his work insisted on giving difference due recognition, for example, through his notion of *Auseinandersetzung* and his claims that relation is more originary than any derived relata. Notions of relationality or interdependence are frequently employed in comparative philosophy, but often sound somewhat idealistic in the sense that interdependence is supposed to help to make every interdependent thing flourish. But such an interpretation of interdependence does not tie well with the usual understanding of conflict, and here, it is the ever conflicting forces in the universe that are my focus. A normal way of understanding harmony is usually thought of as having to do with certain times or instances where such forces are in balance, meaning that neither of the forces is gaining ascendancy, and this is admittedly a useful way of seeing harmony. But it seems a rather static view of what harmony is. Harmony then would be when all things are quiet, and it would seem to preclude discord or conflict. I would rather understand harmony here as a responsiveness to such conflicting forces. As such, harmony is not about balancing differences, nor about making things equal or identical; it is not the undoing of difference or even the minimisation of difference, but in my view it is about a realisation of and responding to, or dealing with difference, and preferably thereby making difference productive.

The processes that constitute the world are typified by conflictual dynamics, forces struggling for assertion and always alternating. The traditional Western dualist approach to such dynamics has usually been to see such forces in a hierarchical fashion, to value one side of the dynamics over the other, and perhaps to seek harmony in one side at the expense of the other. For example, the conflict between reason and desire is commonly resolved by emphasizing the harmonious and logical structures and benefits of the rational person’s way of life over the fickle and destructive nature of our desires. Heidegger does not agree to such an

approach. As a phenomenologist, he rather sees such dynamics as the reality of the world as it appears to us. As such, Heidegger is intent on showing that supposed opposites are really not as incompatible as we might think. For example, in the volume on Heraclitus, he says: “Life and death are the counterposed (*Gegenwendige*). Indeed. But in its ultimate countering, what counterposes turns itself most intimately towards the other. Where this holds sway, is the struggle, *eris*.”¹ Struggle is usually seen as taking place between two or more intrinsically opposite entities, but Heidegger thinks it should rather be seen as intimately connecting two ends of a spectrum. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger puts it in the following way: We would go wrong, he says,

if we were to confound striving (*Streit*) with discord and dispute, and thus see it only as disorder and destruction. In essential striving, rather, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures. Self-assertion or nature, however, is never a rigid insistence upon some contingent state, but surrender to the concealed originality of the source of one’s own being. In the struggle (*Streit*), each opponent carries the other beyond itself.²

And a few lines further down, Heidegger reaffirms this ultimate value of the dynamics of struggle:

In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of this striving. This does not happen so that the work should at the same time settle and put an end to the conflict (*Streit*) in an insipid agreement, but so that the strife (*Streit*) may remain a strife.³

And lastly, the rift that the notion of “conflict” seems to suggest is also not something that should be seen in a purely negative fashion: “The conflict is not a rift (*Riss*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carries the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground.”⁴ Yet of course, but this is aside from my point here, for Heidegger this common ground is the “abyss.” The common ground in Heidegger is not some metaphysical principle outside of the interplay of the “opponents.” As Heidegger puts it in the *Contributions to Philosophy*: “Strife (*Streit*) is essential being (*Wesung*) of the ‘in-between’ (*Zwischen*).”⁵ The common ground is nothing other than the “in-between.”

The point of these quotes is to show that Heidegger is not interested in overcoming conflicts, but in reconsidering the idea of conflict as giving differences their due recognition, in channelling them and in making them productive. In this context, the impossibility of a final victory of one of the

sides of the spectrum over the other must be highlighted. It is the constant interplay, where even if one side seems to be gaining, the other is still there and will bounce back at some point, which is important to Heidegger. Both *Lichtung* and *Verbergung*, or clearing and concealing, belong to the structure of unconcealment, *aletheia*, or Heidegger's version of what truth is. Or in Heidegger's own words: "truth happens as the primal conflict between clearing and concealing."⁶

In short, the interpretation I am about to give is not a regular form of dialectics, but more a realisation of the impossibility of dialectical sublimation. Such an interpretation, in my opinion, has relevance in political thought, where too much focus is still on some form of idealistic conflict solution, whereas my take is that it would be better to speak of conflict management, or resolution. Strangely enough, the term "conflict resolution" is more often than not taken to mean a solution to conflict, whereas conflict resolution, based on the actual meaning of the term "resolution", seems to entail an embrace of conflict, a declaration of conflict, a decision to conflict. Now that may sound negative, but I hope to persuade the reader that instead of shunning the conflictual nature of our world and our existence in it, and instead of seeking some idealistic solution to conflict, Heidegger and Zhuangzi intend to make this conflictual nature productive in a different way of thinking, one that recognises conflict as part and parcel of our existence.

Related to the interplay of unconcealing and concealing, the notions of *Auseinandersetzung*, or con-frontation, and *polemos*, will play an important part in my arguments, especially when we read these notions in their intercultural sense. And we must therefore first turn to Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus.

Heidegger's Heraclitus

Heraclitus is well known for having allegedly said in fragment 53 that "war is the father of all things." Heidegger thinks that this translation is mistaken, or at least one-sided. There is a more originary way of looking at the fragment, which starts with πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι. Heidegger translates: "Confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the sire (who lets emerge)..."⁷ This is already vastly different from standard translations, but even more important is the continuing sentence which is usually left out: ...πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, which Heidegger translates as "...but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway."⁸ Read in this way, far from trying to say that war is the father of all things, Heidegger states that con-frontation, as *Auseinandersetzung*, is the

begetter and keeper of all things. What Heidegger is looking for is another way of seeing *polemos*, which he identifies as *Auseinandersetzung*. This German word is hard to translate adequately. It means a variety of things, including “argument”, “debate”, “analysis”, “engagement”, “examination”, “involvement”, and “contention.” What Heidegger means by this is usually translated as “con-frontation.” Although often thought of as a negative term in the sense of a clash between two identities unwilling to change, if we read this word more carefully, we find the implication that we expose ourselves to the Other, and vice versa, which to Heidegger means that we enter any engagement as much as possible without prejudice, or at least aware of our prejudices and open to different ways of thinking, and we create an atmosphere of mutual coming together in difference (Heidegger stresses the “con-” in *con-frontation*), in which things can show themselves as they are.

At the same time, “con-frontation” means that we position ourselves as different from the Other. The *Auseinandersetzung* is an encounter between the Self and the Other, yet we must let go of the assertively polemic connotations which often accompany the word “confrontation”, or rather, read them in a different way. Heidegger argues that *polemos* is not just polemic, it is really “clearing” (*Lichtung*),⁹ one of the key terms of his later thinking, which is the opening that provides for the unconcealment of things.

The starting point and the end point of an *Auseinandersetzung* must be the openness to difference. But we should also think of con-frontation as *our* con-frontation with the world, our way of being in the world. Our *Auseinandersetzung* through language gives meaning to us, and in that sense, we should be asking how we con-front the world. Heidegger’s answer in this case, of course, has to do with letting things be and letting things show themselves: *Gelassenheit* or releasement, of which more will be said later. In short, an *Auseinandersetzung* does not presuppose two different identities; it is more that the identities are side-effects of the more primordial or more originary *Auseinandersetzung* or *Polemos*.

Auseinander setzen means to set apart, to dis-sect what is primordially a unity. This coincides with the etymology of the word “conflict” somewhat: Conflict derives its meaning from “striking together” (*confligere*). But things striking together need not always be seen as something negative. At the very minimum, it means that at least there is a mutual interest that overlaps. In terms of music, striking two things together creates a sound. Striking two notes (hopefully) creates a harmony, or rather symphony. This is how we can begin to see the *Auseinandersetzung* as *polemos*, or as conflict, to really consist in a

coming together in difference, as harmony.

Let us continue the exploration of Heidegger's Heraclitus. In fragment 8, Heraclitus says: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ' ἕριν γίνεσθαι, or in one common translation: "What opposes unites, and the finest attunement (*harmonia*) stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and all things come about by strife." Another simpler translation reads: "Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony." Heidegger's German translation of this fragment is the following: "*Das Gegen-fahren ein Zusammenbringen und aus dem Auseinanderbringen die eine erstrahlende Fügung.*"¹⁰ As many of us know, the translation of Heideggerian jargon can be notoriously difficult and this is no exception: "The reciprocal play a bringing together, and from the distinction the one shining jointure" would be my loose translation. Heidegger understands *Gegen-fahren* as the play of differences, which is at the same time a bringing together of differences as well as a distinguishing of differences, understood from the idea of "jointure"—harmony for Heidegger—which is nothing other than the space between things filled up by their necessary interaction, in other words, *Auseinandersetzung*. Difference and jointure belong together; they make each other possible, and this must be thought of in a non-hierarchical way. As we shall later see, this way of thinking is also found in Zhuangzi. The title of the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (*Qiwulun* 齊物論) explains how sorting out can be seen as both differentiating and equalising, which we can then read in comparison to *Auseinandersetzung* or *Das Selbe* (the "same").

Heidegger employs a variety of terms or concepts when discussing this play of differences, this *Auseinandersetzung*, this confrontation: he uses terms such as *logos*, gathering, *polemos*, and *physis*, and connects these terms to show that eventually they all point to the same process. In the work on Heraclitus, he says for example that *logos*, *physis* and *harmonia* "say the same."¹¹ And in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he ties them together in the following way: "Confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same."¹² But we should be careful how we read this "sameness" and this "unity." Heidegger makes it quite clear that this is not to be understood in terms of identity or of an undoing of differences. As he says: "But the same is not the merely identical. In the merely identical, the difference disappears. In the same the difference appears..."¹³ In other words, Heidegger is opposed to reducing sameness to identity or equality:

The same never coincides with the equal, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say 'the same' if we think difference. It is in the carrying out and settling of differences that the gathering nature of sameness comes to light.¹⁴

I now want to turn to one of these terms, *physis*, to explain the relation of *logos*, *polemos*, and harmony. Heidegger understands the concept of *physis* as *Fuge*, *Fügung* in the sense of *Harmonia*.¹⁵ Heidegger's interpretation of *physis* as *Aufgehen* and *Untergehen*—to come up and to go down, to ascend and to descend, or unconcealing and concealing—culminates in him saying that harmony, *harmonia*, is the *Fügung*, *Fuge*. *Fuge* concurrently means "joint", "seam", and "gap." Interestingly, Heidegger also translates *harmonia* with the closely related word *Fug* later in this work, and takes it to mean "enjoining", "order", and "fittingness." Incidentally, Heidegger also uses *Fug* as a translation for *dike*, normally "justice." *Fügung*, according to Heidegger, means "jointure" and also "compliance." Heidegger can then say, employing the metaphor of the tightening and untightening of a bow and arrow, that,

[J]ointure (*Fügung*) in itself is particularly the turning-away-from-each-other in the relaxed un-tightening and the turning-back in the sense of the tightening of that, which turns itself in the un-tightening. So harmony does not consist solely in tightening together, in which case the striving apart in the untightening would stay distinguished from it and count at most as an addition to it, but to harmony belongs letting diverge in the untightening.¹⁶

In short, harmony is both coming together *and* moving apart. "*Physis* is the way there and the way back, the going and coming: *harmos*—the reciprocally playing joining—*harmonia*—'jointure'."¹⁷ If we were to do injustice to Heidegger's painstaking retranslations, but conform to more common sense language, it would not be implausible to state quite plainly that Heidegger tries to establish that harmony is found not *in spite of*, but *in* the conflicting yet gathered forces of difference. To be in harmony with the world is, then, not to take a standpoint outside of it in the detachment *from* the world, but to stand inside it and embrace its constant changes.

Another important term that Heidegger uses in this connection is *logos*. *Logos* usually stands for constancy, permanence, rationality and eternal principles, but we have now seen that Heidegger understands *logos* as *polemos*. This means that in Heidegger's view, difference and the interplay of differences is constitutive of any constancy, which would be relative to

this more originary play. Con-frontation or *Auseinandersetzung* is the more originary “begetter” of things. In my view, this is what Heraclitus was also trying to point out, for example in fragment 10: “The bones connected by joints are at once a unitary whole and not a unitary whole. To be in agreement is to differ; the concordant is the discordant.” Or in fragment 80: “It should be understood that war (*polemos*) is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.”

It should be clear by now that any “easy” understanding of harmony does not convey what Heidegger is after. In connection to this, he says in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

Thus Being, *logos*, as the gathered harmony, is not easily available for everyone at the same price, but is concealed, as opposed to that harmony which is always a mere equalizing, the elimination of tension, levelling.¹⁸

Harmony for Heidegger is not about eliminating differences, but about celebrating or embracing them. Being happens only in the interplay of differences, and *logos* and *polemos* are exactly that kind of “gathering” of differences. We must now see whether a similar mode of thought is present in Zhuangzi.

A Polemic Reading of the *Zhuangzi*

It is an important feature of Daoism in general to be sensitive to this interplay of differences, or to the belonging together of seeming opposites. For example, in the *DaoDeJing*, the first chapter talks about the interplay (togetherness) of the nameless and the named; chapter two describes the belonging together of oppositional concepts such as beautiful and ugly, and determinacy (*you* 有) and indeterminacy (*wu* 無); while other chapters such as 28, 36, and 40 all talk about *dao* 道 as the natural vacillation between different ends of a spectrum. In the *Zhuangzi*, we can find a similar understanding that can be related to the Heideggerian focus on the con-frontational or the *Auseinandersetzung*. In chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*, one of the provisional names for *dao* is offered as “Peace-in-Strife”¹⁹ in Burton Watson’s translation. Angus Graham translates these Chinese characters as “[a]t home where it intrudes.”²⁰ And Wing-tsit Chan translates: “tranquillity in disturbance.”²¹ The general idea behind this seems to be of the “unity in diversity” kind, so that only within and through the process of change can there be found a relative stability or harmony, so that this harmony is only to be understood as a function of the

more originary play of differences. It is worth noticing that according to David Hall and Roger Ames, the notion of “tranquillity,” *jing* 靜, is “an ongoing, dynamic achievement of equilibrium. We must recall that all correlative pairs entail their opposites in the sense that *jing* is ‘tranquility-becoming-agitated,’ or ‘tranquility-within-agitation.’”²²

Zhuangzi argues against the division of opposites into separate entities. His arguments against “chop logic”, or the making of such artificial distinctions, suggest that he sees the world in a relational way, where everything has implications and relations with other things, and things and processes cannot easily be separated from each other. Indeed, the only way to talk about opposites or about different forces is when, on a “deeper” level, we understand that these belong together essentially, yet we do not deny their differences.

In what follows, I will not be talking about a utopian vision of harmony, where “Yin and Yang were harmonious and peaceful”²³, the days of the Yellow Emperor or some other nostalgically viewed era, because I don’t think this was Zhuangzi’s concern. Rather, we will look at how Zhuangzi perceives harmony in the world he lived in, which I think is more applicable to the world we live in. So instead of a harmony which dialectically subsumes differences into an overall sublimatory stance, I will argue that Heidegger and Zhuangzi see harmony as the non-dialectical appreciation of the interplay of differences, whereby the differences are not hierarchically ordered.

The *Zhuangzi* shows a reluctance to follow one of the extreme sides of the spectrum, without thereby denying the relevance of these opposites, and here it is helpful to consider the relation between *tian* 天 and man. Zhuangzi’s frequent exaltations of *tian* would make us think that he prefers *tian* above man, but in a later miscellaneous chapter, Zhuangzi says that the perfect man (beyond the sage) hates *tian* and hates even more the question “is it in me from Heaven or from man?”²⁴ Ultimately, even this hierarchy must be seen as artificial. Or as the Autumn Floods dialogue has it:

If we then say ‘Why not take the right as our authority and do without the wrong, take the ordered as our authority and do away with the unruly’, this is failing to understand the pattern of heaven and earth, and the myriad things as they essentially are. It is as though you were to take heaven as your authority and do without earth, take the Yin as your authority and do without the Yang; that it is impracticable is plain enough.²⁵

In Chapter 6, Zhuangzi puts this thought in the following way: “Someone in whom neither Heaven (*tian*) nor man is victor over the other, this is

what is meant by the True Man.”²⁶ In this instance, Zhuangzi argues for a kind of harmony between *tian* 天 and man, in the way of a realisation that in the end a full-fledged dichotomy between the two is untenable. Elsewhere, Zhuangzi says: “For the sage there has never begun to be Heaven, never begun to be man.”²⁷ Although on the surface this might seem to indicate that Zhuangzi seems to be against opposites, what he is actually arguing against is seeing such opposites as final, and against attaching values to the opposites rather than to the overall process that generates them in the first place. Zhuangzi in that sense acknowledges the differential structures of *tian* and man, and says that we should not go with one of them at the expense of the other. Instead, we should be sometimes of *tian*’s party, sometimes of man’s party. Zhuangzi seems to be Hegelian in the sense that he first sets the dichotomy of *tian* and man up, and then seeks to overcome it. But this overcoming is nothing like a sublimation; it is rather an acknowledgement of the dynamics as having arisen out of a gathering of different forces, and a matched responding to these conflicting forces.

Zhuangzi is fond of setting up dichotomies with a seeming hierarchy, or a seeming preference for one side, but then later returns to the dichotomy in order to overthrow or complicate the hierarchy. For example, consider Chapter 1 and the views of the little birds with regards to Peng. There seems to be a definite preference for the ‘bigger picture’ of the bird Peng. But later on in the work, all such views, including Peng’s, are discredited because they remain at a certain level of seeing the world, the level of discriminations. This level of discrimination and artificial distinction is constantly attacked by Zhuangzi. At one point, when he is caught up in a web of creatures spying or preying on each other, Zhuangzi proclaims: “it is inherent in things that they are tied to each other, that one kind calls up another.”²⁸ This translation by Graham makes it clear that he understands Zhuangzi to be saying that things *are* ties, and not that they are separate first, and then *have* ties. Such an interpretation is obviously conducive to notions of interdependence and relationality.

Another story from the Inner Chapters, about storing the boat in the ravine or storing it in the world (again in Chapter 6), shows that we are mistaken if we look for safety and harmony in a dialectical, but ultimately very shallow and artificial way by trying to avoid one aspect of the world. When we realise that real harmony only lies in acceptance of how the entire world works, then harmony and conflict ultimately belong together.

For the reading I propose, Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* is also of tremendous importance. Zhuangzi talks about things being one, especially in this chapter, but observes that we cannot say they are one, since then we