

Harmony Among Humans, Nature and God

A Comprehensive Vision of Optimal Harmony

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I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of harmony is based upon humankind's existential experience and the ideal state of existence he is longing for. An individual could not live along without harmony, although for earning his/her autonomy and a better life, he/she might struggle with fellowmen, Nature and God. But the harmony we have in everyday life is merely fragmentary. Once a bit of harmony is happily tasted, again we fall into the bitterness of struggle and conflict.

But, just as we are envious of health when actually ill, humankind is specially longing for harmony when caught up in social disorder or psychological disequilibrium. For example, Confucianism cherishes the harmony between an individual and his fellowmen, but it emerged in the decadence of social norms in the Chou dynasty. Taoism, all in emphasizing harmony between human and nature, came into being during a time of vehement war and social disorder. Christianity, reminding us above all of the harmony between human and God, concerns itself most with human suffering and evil.

For me, the idea of harmony should be analyzed in referring to the relation between an individual and other fellowmen, the relation between human beings and nature, the relation between human beings and God, all three constitute the essential framework of human existence. This means that the idea of harmony could be understood now only in the context of an ontology of relation, which means all existents, all beings, are in some kind of dynamic relation in which they tend towards one another and constitute the meaningfulness of their existence.

As we know, the ontology of substance since Aristotle has been replaced, in this Century, by the ontology of event, for example, by Whitehead's concept of event¹ or by Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis*.² But, as we can see clearly now, the ontology of event³ is only transitory and has to cede its place to the ontology of dynamic relation in which the idea of harmony is more pertinently situated. We can say that Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity all proclaim each of them a certain kind of ontology of relation. But to affirm relation is to affirm the irreducibility of the other,⁴ either as impersonal other such as Nature, or as personal other such as human beings and God.

The structural framework of the relations between human beings and Reality is constituted by the relations between an individual and his fellowmen, human and Nature, human and God. Among all these three relations, there is a contrasting tension between Harmony and Conflict. All we have to do is , on the one hand, to keep the harmonious relations one has already with others, and on the other, to maximize, to optimize the harmony in realizing one's self and in coordinating the totality.

II. HARMONY WITH FELLOWMEN

On the human level, we are all born into the world in a relational context, that of our parents and that of the social world. That's the reason why Confucianism concerns itself mostly with the harmonization of a human being's relation with his fellowmen. One of the main concerns of Confucianism is the meaning of social order and the meaning of human existence in it.

I. THE TRANSCENDENTAL FOUNDATION OF HARMONY

Confucius himself had endeavored to re-vitalize the ancient social order instituted by Chou-li by rendering it meaningful in a transcendental way. In pre-Confucian China, Chou-li embraced both the ideal and the actual aspects of religious, ethical and political life in ancient China. In its actual meaning, Chou-li has three essential aspects: the sacrificial ceremonies, the social and political institutions, and the code of daily behavior. Ideally speaking, it represented an ideal image of the cultural tradition as Order imbued with sense of beauty or Harmony. It represented for Confucius a comprehensive ideal of human life in general, just as the concept of *Paideia* was for the ancient Greek people.

But in the time of Confucius, the period of Spring and Autumn, it was a time of political turmoil leading to social disorder, a time qualified by Confucius as "without order and justice." For example, Confucius said, "In the government of an empire with order and justice, the initiative and final decisions in matters of religion, education, and declaration of war forms the supreme prerogative of the emperor. In the government of an empire without order and justice, that prerogative passes into the hands of the princes of the empire, in which case it is seldom that ten generations pass before they lose it. Should that prerogative pass into the hands of the nobility of the empire, it has rarely happened that they have retained it for five generations."⁵

In this state of political disorder, Chou-li began to lose this deeper meaning while still keeping its realistic and superficial meaning as a code of behavior, social and political institutions and religious ceremonies. Confucius tried to revitalize Chou-li by translating its ideal meaning into the concept of Jen(仁), which signified and represented for him the sensitive interconnectedness between human being's inner self with other human beings, with nature and even with Heaven. Jen manifests man's subjectivity and responsibility in and through his sincere moral awareness, and in the meanwhile, it means also the intersubjectivity giving support to all social and ethical life. That's why Confucius said that Jen is not

remote or difficult to Human beings, only if an individual will for it, Jen is there in himself. By thus doing Confucius had laid a transcendental foundation to human being's interaction with nature, with society and even with Heaven.

And then, from the concept of Jen, Confucius deduced the concept of Yi (義), righteousness, which represented for him the respect for and proper actions towards the others. That's why Confucius said, "A wise and good man makes Righteousness the substance of his being; he carries it out with the ritual order. He speaks it with modesty and he attains it with sincerity – such a man is a really good and wise man!"⁶ Righteousness is also the criterion by which are discerned a good man and a base guy. On righteousness was based all moral norms, moral obligations, our consciousness of them, and even the virtue of always acting according to them. And from the concept of Yi, Confucius deduced that of Li (禮), the ritual, the proprieties, which represented the ideal meaning and actual codes of behavior, political institutions and religious ceremonies. You Tzu, a disciple of Confucius, once said that "The function of the ritual consists best in harmony." Li, the ritual, as an overall concept of cultural ideal, means for me a graceful order leading to harmony.

Through this procedure of transcendental deduction, Confucianism reconstitutes and thereby revitalizes the ethical and social order implied in Chou-li and the meaningfulness of human existence in it. The dimension of meaning in human existence is therefore to be understood within the context of totality constituted of relations between Human beings imbued with a sense of orderly beauty or a sense of harmony

2. PERSONAL EXCELLENCE AND HARMONIZATION OF RELATIONSHIP

In Confucianism, a life of harmony has to be concretized as a life of virtue. Virtue is to be seen as both the excellence of human natural abilities and the harmonization of human relationship. Obligation is considered as necessary when it helps to form and achieve virtue. Confucius cherished virtues such as wisdom, humanness, and bravery. I would interpret the virtue of wisdom as the excellence of human intellect, virtue of Jen or humanness as the excellence of human feeling, and the virtue of bravery as the excellence of human will. For Mencius, human nature possesses four beginnings of goodness, these could be seen as four natural capacities of humankind tending towards goodness. And the virtues such as humanness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are to be seen as fulfillment of these four beginnings of goodness in human nature. In the interpretation of the concept of righteousness, righteousness as virtue precedes always righteousness as obedience to moral obligations.

In the case of Confucianism, virtue, as excellence of human abilities, never limits itself within the individual, but instead it refers always to some relations with others. For example, Confucius, when asked about a life of Jen by Tzu Chang, answered that, "A man who can carry out five virtues leads a life of Jen...They are earnestness, consideration for others, trustworthiness, diligence and generosity. If you are earnest, you will never meet with want of respect. If you are considerate

to others, you will win the heart of the people. If you are diligent, you will be successful in your undertakings. If you are generous, you will find plenty of men who are willing to serve you.”⁷ It is clear that all these virtues refer to others and the reactions from others. They are ways of harmonizing human relationships and are therefore relational virtues.

Virtues are also to be formed in the five essential relationships, consisting always in the harmonization of human relationships, whether it concerns the relation between husband and wife, or parents and children, or brothers and sisters, or friends and lovers, or individual and society. These are now to be seen merely as biological or social relationship. On the contrary, they are to be realized as ethically meaningful relationships. The meaning of a good relationship, such as piety, fidelity, scurrility, royalty,...etc., could be interpreted differently according to the custom of the times, but its essence as the harmonization of relationship stays always as valid now and forever.

3. *FROM RECIPROCITY TO UNIVERSALITY*

The process of harmonization of relationship is a process of enlargement from reciprocity to universality. Reciprocity is essential for human relationship according to Confucianism. Just as the way Confucius responded to Dzaiwuo, who proposed two arguments, one based upon the necessity of maintaining social order, the other based upon the circle of natural process, against the maintenance of funeral rites. But Confucius answered him by the argument of human reciprocity, that, in the earliest time of our childhood we were taken care of by our parents and this was the reason why we observe those rites; in response to the love of our parents for us. The form of these ritual practices could be changed according to the demand of times, but the essence of reciprocity in human relationship remains.

But the good human relationship comes to its fulfillment when enlarged from reciprocity to universality. That's why Confucius, when asked by Dzu Luh concerning how a paradigmatic individual behaves, answered first by the cultivation of oneself for one's dignity, then cultivation of oneself for the happiness of others, finally cultivation oneself for the happiness of all the people. From reciprocity to universality, this means that we should transcend the limit of special relationship to universal relationship, even to the point of seeing people within four seas as brothers. Which means humankind could treat other fellowmen, without regard for his family, profession, company, race and country, but just with Jen, a universal love, only because he is a member of the humankind. This is the way by which Confucianism enlarges the harmonization of human relationship, the fully unfolding of which is the process of formation of a virtuous life, not merely a life of observing absolutized obligations.

Confucian ethics is an ethics of virtue rather than an ethics of obligation, as some contemporary Neo-Confucians such as Mou Tzong-san would think. But virtue consists in two things, the excellence of human ability and the harmonization of human relationship. Leading with the priority of virtue,

Confucian ethics could also accept those good considerations of ethics of obligation and even utilitarian ethics. The most important principle is that a life of harmony could only be achieved by attaining excellence of one's ability all in harmonizing human relationship, or, in the other way round, by harmonizing human relationship all in accomplishing the excellence of one's abilities.

III. HARMONY WITH NATURE

Human existence stands on the support of Nature. Not only the relation between an individual and his fellowmen needs to be harmonious, the relation between human and Nature and that between natural beings are also in need of harmony. Especially with the deepening of the industrialization process, the abuse of technology has brought about environmental problems and ecological disequilibrium, the harmony between man and nature becomes more urgent. Here we can learn from Taoism.

I. FORGETFULNESS OF TAO AS ORIGIN OF DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS

Taoism emerged also in a time of social disorder and frequent war. Under Lao Tzu's penetrating criticism, the society of his time was revealed to be full of social problems provoked by political domination. He wrote "The people suffer because their rulers eat up too much in taxes. That is why they starve. The people become difficult to govern because those in authority have too many projects of action. That is why they are difficult to govern. The people take death lightly because their rulers have too many desires. That is why they take death lightly."⁸

This severely critical text shows us that, for Lao Tzu, social problems were produced by the political domination of rulers themselves rather than the insufficiency of channels of realization for desired values in the society. Chou-li was in Lao Tzu's eyes but means of social domination hindering and distorting human being's communication with others and, most seriously, with Tao. The domination by violent power was manifested par excellence by vehement wars. He wrote again: "Whenever armies are stationed, briars and thorns become rampant. Great wars are inevitably followed by famines." And "The weapons of war are instruments of evil, and they are detested by people ... When a multitude of people are slaughtered, it should be an occasion for the expression of bitter grief. Even when a victory is scored, the occasion should be observed with funeral ceremonies."⁹ The mentioning of famines and the fact that briars and thorns became rampant shows us also the deterioration of human relationship brings about other problems.

Deeper critical reflection by Lao Tzu suggested that power domination came from desire and the instrumental rationality it manipulated. At that time the lust for goods and desire of power were highly elevated. People strove for fame and position. Intellectuals rendered service to political power and became themselves instrument of political domination. People sacrificed their spiritual freedom for the prize of the lustful desire and instrumental rationality. Lao Tzu even criticized Confucian ideology in saying that Confucianism put too much emphasis on

deliberate actions taken with anthropocentric self-consciousness, which by so doing inclined to forget the spontaneity of human being and his rooting in Tao. Thereby, instead of Confucian deduction of Yi from Jen and Li from Yi for the revitalization of Chou Li, quite contrarily, Jen would degenerate into Yi and Yi degenerates into Li, and Li, as form of domination and violence, would become the origin of social conflict.

Taoist concept of critique has an ontological dimension in the sense that it bases all social critique and critique of ideology on human being's relation to Tao. Domination, instrumental rationality and ideology are but consequences of human being's forgetfulness of Tao. What Heidegger calls forgetfulness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*),¹⁰ Lao Tzu would call it "forgetfulness of Tao." It means that human being's self-understanding should refer ultimately to Tao or Being in Itself, and the consequence of human being's forgetfulness of Tao is that he cannot fully understand himself. Ultimately speaking, the function of critique is to bring human being to his own full self-understanding, in transcending all unconscious dissimulation by critical reflection.

2. *THE SCARCITY OF BODY VERSUS THE RICHNESS OF THE POSSIBLE*

Seen from the perspective of Taoism, when we talk about the harmonization of man with nature, we should refer to the Way Itself. In the philosophy of Taoism, the Way Itself is called Tao. Etymologically, the word Tao is composed of two elements, the head and the act of walking on a way. Together they mean a way on which one could walk out a direction and a way out. As Heidegger says, it is improper to represent Tao as a physical way, as the distance relating two locus. However, Tao might be "the Way which put everything on the ways."¹¹

On the one hand, one should say "Tao" in order to express it. But once said, it becomes a Constructed Reality and not the Reality Itself. In order to keep open to Reality Itself, all human constructions should be ready for further deconstruction. That's why Lao Tzu said, "The Tao that could be said is not the Eternal Tao."¹²

In order to know the Way of Tao, it is necessary to know how Tao becomes body. According to Lao Tzu, Tao manifests itself first as possibilities, as the nothingness, then among all possibilities, some are realized, and to be realized is to take the form of body. At this moment, there was engendered a realm of being. Therefore we can say that the possible is infinitely richer than the real, and nothingness is infinitely vaster than being. On the ontological level, there is a kind of scarcity of being in relation to nothingness. In other words, the nothingness, the possible is rich, whereas being, the real, is scarce.

Creation in the Taoist sense consists in the process through which Tao self-manifests first as the whole realm of possibilities, and then some possibilities become real. To become real is to let the possible realize themselves and consequently to incarnate in the form of body. Being means the incarnation of the possible. If the possible is liberated from all constraint, the real is always being in

a certain concrete form of body. Creation is therefore a dialectical process between being and nothingness, between freedom and constraint.

But, if to become being is an essential aspect of creation, the scarcity of body is also essential for grasping its truth. It is because of the scarcity of body that we are in search of other bodies in our perceptual, sexual and social life. As to our ultimate concern in questions such as life and death, they are to be seen from the cosmic process of realization of Tao in the body. On the one hand, to live means to take the form of a living body. According to Taoism, it is the effect of an organic accumulation of the cosmic energy. On the other hand, to die or to perish is the effect of dispersion of the cosmic energy. Even if to live, or the fact of being able to take the form of a living body, is in itself a joy of existence, to die is not a lamentable occasion. It is for this reason that Chuang Tzu said, "The Great Clod (*the Earth*) burdens me with the form of body, labors me with tiresome life, eases me in old ages and rests me in death. So if it makes my life good, it must for the same reason make my death good."¹³ In this way one is liberated from the worrisome concern of life and death, the freedom effected by which is essential for a life of sanity. Chuang Tzu said, "I receive life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you."¹⁴

The openness of mind leading to the ultimate harmony is not limited to this liberation from all attachment to the differentiation between life and death. For Taoism, human beings should follow the rhythm of cosmic creativity instead of imposing oneself upon a specific form of existence. In the process of cosmic creativity one should not impose one's subjective will in discriminating human body from other kind of bodies. This is to say that the scarcity of body doesn't mean the superiority of human body. For Chuang Tzu there is an ontological equality among all living bodies. That's why in Taoist eyes there should not be any preference for a human body. Chuang Tzu would even accept to be transformed into a rat's liver or a bug's arm. This ontological vision of body transcends our anthropocentric preference. Chuang Tzu relates:

"Why should I resent." Answers the ill, "If the process continues, perhaps in time he'll transform my left arm into a rooster. In that case I'll keep watch on that night. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my right arm into a crossbow pellet and I'll shoot down an owl for roasting. Or perhaps in time he will transform my buttocks into a cartwheel. Then, with my spirit for a horse, I'll climb up and go for a ride."¹⁵

Unafraid of death, even meeting it with a joyful acceptance – this then produces an ultimate freedom, getting rid of all horror of the illness from oneself. But this is supported by the Taoist thesis of the scarcity of body, which is complemented by the thesis of equality of all bodies. As locus of appearing of Tao, all beings are sons of the Mother Tao; consequently all beings are equal. In terms of Chuang Tzu, since all beings are specific incarnations of Tao, there is no need to discern the noble from the mean, the true from the false, the rational from the

sensible. There is but one ontology, that of the Tao, which penetrates and immerses itself in all beings. This enlargement of existence brings us to a kind of open mind supportive of a life of sanity.

3. *MAN-NATURE HARMONY AND THE TAOIST LIFE-PRAXIS*

But, even if Chuang Tzu, for the reason of his ontological visions mentioned above, does not make any distinction between the noble and the mean, the true and the false, the rational and the sensible – he would accept even to become a rat's liver or a bug's arm – nevertheless, in the profundity of his soul, he has a beautiful dream. It is to become a butterfly, for him the most beautiful and free being wandering and playing in the Nature. He says:

Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. Between Chuang Chou and a butterfly there must be some distinction. And this is called the transformation of things.¹⁶

Becoming a butterfly, being free and beautiful, wandering and playing in nature, this symbolizes the golden age of existence when human beings are in union with the Nature. Instead of becoming a rat or a bug, Chuang Tzu prefers to become a butterfly. On the ontological level, there is no distinction between Chuang Chou and the butterfly. But, on the ontic level, there must be a difference between the two. But the free and beautiful style of existence surpasses all differentiation and returns to the original union with Tao, with the Way. And this is achieved through a profound life praxis. According to Lao Tzu, this life praxis begins by unifying one's bodily and spiritual functions of soul in meditation, and then, by a way of natural breath, purifying one's spirit to its softest point, thus clarifying one's consciousness to the point of becoming a metaphysical looking glass in order to have intuition of essence of all thing by letting them be, and then, through a kind of mystical passivity, returning to the union with Tao Itself.¹⁷

According to Chuang Tzu, this life praxis begins from the spontaneous control of breathing to the point of minimizing the unconscious desire and its unconscious expression through dreams. He said,

The True Human of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without care...The True Human breathes with his heels; the mass of men breathe with their throat. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though they were retching. Deep in their passions and desires, they are shallow in the sensitivity to Heaven's working.¹⁸

For Freud, dreaming is a disguised way of expressing one's unconscious desire. But for Chuang Tzu, to be too much immersed in passions and desires would render shallow the sensitivity to Heaven's working. But there is still a way out, that is, by a profound and natural way of breathing, as deep as breathing with one's heels, by which one could minimize one's desire to the extent of sleeping

without dreaming and waking without daily care.

But a more profound way of life praxis¹⁹ is symbolized by the narrative concerning the Butcher Ting who, cutting an ox, behaves in such a marvelous way that he slithered the knife along with the musical rhythm of dancing, as good as an artistic performance. "All was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-sou music."²⁰

According to my interpretation, an ox is a living being constituted in a very complicated way, signifying thereby the complexity of life, individual as well as social. But, with an art of life praxis which is capable of grasping the complexity of life, one could eventually follow the natural rhythm and earn the way of freedom. As the narrative of the butcher says:

And now – now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural laws, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are.

There are spaces between the joints, and the blades of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room – more than enough for the blade to play about it.²¹

The praxis of life as illustrated by the narrative of the butcher makes its progress from the technical level to that of the Tao, and becomes art thereby. It is in fact an art of life praxis which realizes itself in the dynamism and movement of body. The body is therefore the locus for this praxis, as the incarnation of the art of life praxis. And the scarcity of body is only one reason for which human beings should entertain and economize his body in such a way as not to get lost in the vicissitude of events. In concentrating oneself and in following the natural way of life, could a free and fresh way of life be accomplished, the fulfillment of a life of harmony.

IV. HARMONY WITH GOD

Besides the relation of an individual with his fellowmen, that of Human with Nature, there is, ultimately speaking, the relation between Human and God. For Christianity, the harmony with God is the original foundation of all other harmonious relations. This is based upon the Christian concept of God as creator of all things and it's concern for human suffering and evil. In the Bible, these were expressed in different forms such as jealousy, murder, war, illness, death, slavery, exile, natural calamities...etc. It is for saving humankind from suffering and evil that it is pertinent for Christianity to talk about salvation. Christianity, in its essential parts, explains the origin of suffering and evil in referring to the constitution of human nature, of which the relationship between human and God is an essential constituent.

I. RELATION WITH GOD AS THE FOUNDATION OF ALL OTHER RELATIONS

When thinking of Christian vision of human nature and God-man relation, one

might think of the doctrine of original sin. For some theologians the original sin represents the original darkness in human nature inherited from Adam and Eve after they acted against a prohibitive rule of God. But, taking into consideration the Biblical context in which the narrative of so called “original sin” appears, it would be better to interpret it as the defilement of a human nature which is originally created by God as good and in harmonious relationship with God.

As I see it, the narrative of Adam’s falling in *Genesis* shows us that human nature is originally created to be good because it is situated in an ontology of goodness and a theology of *Imago Dei*. First, the environment of human existence is constituted by all things which, after each was created by God, were proclaimed as good by Him. This is the ontological foundation upon which human beings emerge. Second, Human beings are created by God according to the image of God. “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”²² Since God is supreme Good, his likeness should also be good, not evil in itself. And third, human beings are created with cognitive faculty and free will and are responsible for their own action. This is the transcendental foundation of all moral good and evil.

The evil came when human beings abused their free will and interrupted an intersubjective relation with God, relation as represented by a covenant of rule of action. By this interruption of relation, human beings were enclosed in the arrogance of their own subjectivity, cutting themselves from their relation with God. Right after this interruption, human beings began to suffer. Evil and suffering were then a consequence of the degeneration of human nature as *Imago Dei* and the ungrateful refusal of one’s relation with God. After original sin, humankind began to have suffering and evil. Cain murdered Abel, and other evils on and on. And humankind must work in order to survive. He must make effort in order to return to a harmonious relationship with nature and with God.

In Christianity, human nature as created in the likeness of God is originally good, but in the empirical exercises of this free will, human being could both possibly and actually choose to be self-enclosed to the point of denying good relationship with God, and thereby falls. This is similar to Chinese philosophy where Confucianism asserts that human nature is transcendently good, but Taoist critique by Lao Tzu shows its empirical degeneration process because of the negligence and forgetfulness of Tao and Teh.²³ The difference is that Confucianism should wait for Taoism for such a critical reflection on human falling, whereas we find in Christianity a comprehensive image of the originally good human nature and its falling.

We have to notice here, that, since Christianity allows more liberty to human free will, and therefore more responsibility to human action, it recognizes much autonomy to human subjectivity, to the extent that it might seclude itself from all other, even to the point of rejecting God. The so called “hell” is the state of existence in which the human individual refuses God, cutting himself from all relation with the other, and thereby excluding himself from his own salvation, not to mention his own possibility of perfection.²⁴ But even if human being could

exclude himself from God, the love of God is infinitely immense so that such a state of existence could not refuse the penetration of God's love. Just as St. Augustine, who upheld in the most vehement way the existence of Hell, said that, "Even if I were in Hell You would be there *for if I go down into hell, Thou art there also.*"²⁵ God's love will never abandon any being whatsoever, it is because of this that Jesus came to the world to save humankind. In Christianity, salvation is the process of divine grace corroborating the self transformation and enhancement of human spirit towards divine perfection from all human beings' state of self-exclusion rooted in its finitude and selfishness.

2. IMMANENCE /TRANSCENDENCE AND THE CHRISTIAN ULTIMATE REALITY

For the Christians, God is the Ultimate Reality. There is no salvation without God. As St. Augustine puts it, "our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."²⁶ He means that the human heart could not be calmed down until it find itself in the presence and grace of God. This sets up a principle of transcendence to the fulfillment of human potentiality. But the human soul is still related to God within the most profound being in itself and thereby the principle of immanence is still recognized by Christianity to a certain degree. On the one hand, the dynamism of human nature is important for salvation, because this demands his free will and virtuous efforts. On the other hand, this dynamism is not to be kept enclosed within itself, without openness to the other, and ultimately to an absolute Other, otherwise human beings finds no fulfillment and therefore no salvation. In this sense, Christianity embodies also this wisdom of contrast which has profoundly grasped this dynamic tension within human nature and the relation between God and man. Jesus Christ has clearly articulated this truth when he said,

Believe me, woman. The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come – in fact it is here already – when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.²⁷

Here Jesus proclaims a general salvation history, which begins from Jesus on, and the only worship revealed by God through Jesus, is to worship God in spirit and truth. Those who worship God in this way could have their salvation, while not limited to external factors such as any place or any racial or cultural groups. In this sense, "worship" means a way to bring out what is most sincere in one's own spirit, and to experience the truth as revealed to the human subjectivity in question. This recognizes the immanence principle by which the human being worships God with the participation of his utmost sincere spiritual dynamism.

In Christianity, the so called immanence principle is based upon the fact that all men are created *Imago Dei*. In some sense we can say that, for Christians, there is also certain divine nature in human beings by which we should be as perfect as our Father in Heaven. This divinity of human being is affirmed by Jesus when He says, "Is it not written in your Law: 'I said, you are gods?' So the Law

uses the word “gods” of those to whom the word of God was addressed, and scripture cannot be rejected.”²⁸ Therefore, it is a common affirmation in Judeo-Christian tradition. Human beings are created *Imago Dei*. They are also children of God. It is in this sense that human beings could be seen as gods. This divinity of human beings is therefore related ontologically to God. It could be seen as the inner light, the locus of enlightenment, of human existence.

Nevertheless, in Christianity, this immanence principle claims also a transcendence principle by which human beings will not be limited and thereby enclosed in his own subjectivity. Because there will be always God, and the truth and spirit are openness to God. Human spiritual illumination is never limited to itself and by itself, because in the human enlightenment there is relation with and participation of divine illumination. It is in this sense that I understood what St. Augustine said, “God hath created man’s mind rational and intellectual, whereby he may take in His light...and He so enlighteneth it of Himself, that not only those things which are displayed by the truth, but even truth itself may be perceived by the mind’s eye.”²⁹ By this openness to God and enlightenment from God, human beings will never be enclosed in “*Man, all too human*” type of humanism. In this sense, “worships” means to enhance one’s self to the spirit of God and to the truth as enlightened by God himself to us. This is to say that in Christianity the immanence principle is always related to and enhanced by the transcendence principle and never to be separated from it.

For Christians, God is the most perfect Spiritual Being. He is the creator of the whole universe, including human beings, other sentient beings and all other things, a God unexplainable and unfathomable by all human discourses such as science, philosophy and theology. God is the first cause and the final end of the whole universe. God has created all beings in the universe, in which emerged human beings, who, after arrived at certain age, become selfish and egocentric, and tend to indulge himself in enclosure within his arrogant self, to the exclusion of his relationship with God. This means the beginning of a sinful life. It is because of this reason that God Himself came to the world and became truly man in order to deliver human beings from this self-exclusion or self-arrogance by His universally altruistic suffering and death on the cross, in order to liberate them from this sinful existence. The last end of human life and the world is to return to God and there will be the coming of the New Heaven and Earth.

To say that God is the creator and the fulfillment of all beings is not to identify Him with Being, as some scholastic philosophers would do. But I will follow St. Thomas when he distinguished Being, which is the act of existence of all beings but which could not be seen as self-subsistent, and God, who is *Ipsium esse subsistens*.³⁰ Besides, we should add that in God there is also unfathomable possibilities, which could be but is not yet. Here God could be conceived only in a negative way, as taught by negative theology. Without a better term, we could term these unfathomable possibilities as “nothingness”, without it there will be no possibility for further fulfillment of Being. God’s unfathomability forbids us to identify Him with Being. God is Being and God transcends Being. He transcends

therefore the distinction between Being and nothingness, and out of nothingness, He created all beings.

We could say also that God is personal, in the sense that He is conscious and spiritual, that He knows and loves. But we can also say that He is not personal, in the sense that He is not “consciousness” and “spiritual” in the way that we are. He knows, but not in the sense that we know. He loves, but not in the sense that we love. According to the *via positiva*, we could say that God is Being and personal. According to the *via negativa*, we should say that he is neither Being nor personal as we conceive. God is personal and God transcends personality. We should say with Teilhard de Chardin that God is hyperpersonal.

In Taoism as well as in Buddhism, there is a common tendency towards Nothingness or Emptying as the most profound experience, so much so as to go beyond even the experience of worshipping a personal God. Different from the Christian emphasis on the God as *Summum Bonum* and the fulfillment of their being in God as the destiny of all beings. For Lao Tzu, Tao is even more ancient than a God, the Lord of the realm of beings, whereas Tao manifests through both being and nothingness. Being is there to manifest the traces and limits of realization, whereas nothingness is to manifest the marvelous possibilities. The unceasing dialectics between both leads to the gate of Tao, transcending all forms of realization. It is something similar to the Heideggerian *Ab-grund*³¹, the always departing from all foundation. In Heidegger's eyes, the Christian conceptual framework is more like what he called the “onto-theo-logy”³², on the one hand it affirms Being as the ontological foundation of all things, on the other hand, it affirms God as the theological foundation of Being. On the contrary, Buddhism is more like a kind of anti-foundationalism. The Emptying of all emptying is without any foundation and continues to depart from all foundation, in order to keep the human spirit as free as possible.

3. MAN-GOD COMMUNION AND EXPERIENCE OF NOTHINGNESS

But, even if the Taoist experience of nothingness is most profound in its potentialities, still this does not mean that there is no God as Fulfillment of Being. Even if our freedom is so radical that not a single human discourse, no philosophical, scientific or theological doctrine could serve as foundation to our existence, still this does not mean that we are foundationless. There must be a certain foundation of Being, although the foundation itself is unfathomable and all our founding discourse should be deconstructed in order to keep human spirit and its foundation free.

Taoism tends not to identify the Ultimate Reality with Being. It is also reluctant to recognize a personal God. It seems that for Taoism, the personalization of God is, as is in the case of Buddhism, a sign of inferiority, when compared with the rich experience of impersonal Tao.³³ According to Taoism, Tao self-manifests into all things and resides in them, becoming thereby the natural laws. There are three natural laws: First, Structural Law: All things are structurally constituted of opposite but complementary elements such as

Ying/Yang, Rest/Movement...and the like. Second, Dynamic Laws: The exhaustion of one state of affairs goes dialectically to its opposite state of affairs. Third, Teleological Laws: The dialectical movement of the opposites aims finally at returning to Tao itself. These three natural laws operate despite human willingness and are therefore impersonal. In some sense, being impersonal is richer than being personal.

In Christianity, God created Nature and its laws. Besides, God himself is everywhere in the world. God is impersonal not only in the sense of his unfathomableness, but also in the sense of his immanence in the lawfulness of natural world and in the irreducible justice of the human world.

Still I think it is more human to think that God is personal who knows and loves and to whom we could pray. Although there is also a profound meaning in God as impersonal, an inflexible maintaining of this thesis might also fall into an insensible cult in which there is no personal interaction and dialogue. It would become a state of mind into which an impersonalist interpretation of God and Tao has the danger to fall. This state of mind is something similar to what Jesus has described:

What description can I find for this generation? It is like Children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: "We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners."³⁴

For us human beings, to say God is personal is to say that God does know and love and that we can pray to Him in our heart. But this does not mean that He knows, loves and listens to our prayers in our *human, too human* way. It is in this sense we can say that God is not personal but hyperpersonal, which means not that God does not know and love, but that he knows and loves in a hyper-excellent way. Especially in the Christian tradition of mysticism, God is Mystery of all mysteries. In the mystical experience of God, there is voidness of the soul, and also a certain moment in which we enter in the darkness of the soul, as St. John of the Cross would characterize it, where a contemplative prayer enters into a mysterious, passive phase of experience losing himself in an overwhelming rhythm not to be qualified as an interpersonal experience at all. In any case, God transcends the distinction between personality and impersonality. God is personal as well as hyperpersonal. In this contrast there emerges a tension of experience in which our relation with God becomes more and more profound.

Christian mysticism is different from Taoism in the fact that it recognizes not only the impersonal, passive, profound experience of nothingness, but also a personal love and dialogue between man and God, leading towards their mutual communion. Also in Christianity, there are richly various forms of communion, as concretized in the Covenants between humankind and God, communions among people, prayers, meditations, religious rites, Sacrament of communion, mystic grace...etc. This means that man could return to a harmonious relation with God through everyday life, religious rites and mystic experiences. The main purpose of these forms of communion is to return to the original harmony between man and God, which serves as the foundation of harmonious relation between man and

fellowmen, man and Nature. It is in this way that a life of harmony is optimized and human potentialities are fully unfolded.

V. WORDS OF CONCLUSION

Human being's search for harmony must begin from this human world. Among all human relationship, an individual has to conduct himself as human, making effort on the one hand for the excellence of his natural ability and on the other for the harmonization of relations. This means that Confucian ethics of virtue is essential for maintaining a harmonious life.

On this point, Christianity is quite at one with Confucianism. In the *Old Testament*, the rule set in the Garden by God to Adam and Eve is a rule by covenant, that is, a rule for the maintenance of relationship between God and Human beings. And the moral obligations concretized in the Ten commandments are the result of the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel. Respect for the justice of God constitutes the reason for Israel's obedience of the obligations expressed in the Ten Commandments. These are not to be considered as heteronomy, as some scholars maintained in criticizing Christianity. Any distinction between autonomy and heteronomy still belongs to the ethics of obligation, in which there is priority of norm over virtue. But in Christianity, the truth is quite to the contrary. And this is more evident in the *New Testament*, in which Jesus said, "If you love me then obey my order." Here the relation of love is in priority over the obedience of order. Obey, in order to love. Love is the essence of Jesus' commandment. Faith, hope, love, justice, wisdom, temperance...etc., are all important virtues in Christian ethics. In short, Christian ethics is an ethics of virtue which emphasizes the perfection of human good and the fulfillment of good relationship.

Nowadays, when the utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics just cannot work for the meaningfulness of human life in the valley of nihilism, I think it is the common spiritual resources of both Christianity and Confucianism to emphasize the priority of virtue over utility and obligation. Virtue is seen in these grand traditions as both the development and fulfillment of the goodness originally existing in human nature, both as the excellence of human ability and as realization of good relationship. Obligation is considered as necessary only when it helps to form and achieve a virtuous life. Obligations are never taken at their face value, they exist for the formation of virtues. Human excellence and good relationship are always presupposed in the observance of obligations.

But Confucianism is accused quite often of being too much occupied with human affairs. To this, Taoism has rightly pointed out the necessity to decentralize human concern for the concern of nature and to re-situate humankind's place in Nature. It is still more important to trace back to our original relation with Tao, the ontological source of all creativity. Otherwise our ethical dynamism could degenerate into social conflict and disorder. By returning back to a union with Tao, man not only got an infinite source of creativity but was

also rendered more spontaneously human thereby.

But, as Christianity points out, the union with Tao could not be a losing of one's self in an anonymous logos, or a union with a spontaneous but impersonal nature. The Ultimate Reality should be above all impersonal determinism, personal or hyperpersonal with whom one could have intersubjective dialogue and interpersonal communion.

Through Confucian ethics of virtue, an individual could realize harmony with his fellowmen; through Taoist life praxis, human being could eventually achieve harmony with Nature; Through multiple Christian ways in everyday life, religious rites or by mystic grace, an individual could return to his original harmony with God. In thus developing deeper and deeper these three-level existential relations, keeping each part free and peace, all together they could form a maximum degree of harmony.

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- 1 A.N. Whitehead, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), pp.60-63
 - 2 M. Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, (Pfullingen: Max Niemeyer, 1972), p.19
 - 3 Recently new elaboration by A. Badiou in *L'Être et l'événement*, (Paris: Edition du Seil, 1988)
 - 4 For me the philosophical concept of the other is best elaborated by Levinas in his *Totalité et infini*. I see it also an example of the metaphysics of relationship.
 - 5 *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius*, translated by Ku Hung-ming, (Taipei, Prophet Press, 1976), p.145 some corrections by myself.
 - 6 Ibid., pp.137-138 some corrections by myself
 - 7 Ibid., p. 154
 - 8 *The Works of Lao Tzu*, ch.75.
 - 9 Ibid., Chapters 30, 31.
 - 10 M. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972, p.336; *Über den Humanismus*, in *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1964, p.159.
 - 11 M. Heidegger, *Unterweg zur Sprache*, (Tübingen: Neske,1959),S. 198
 - 12 Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, Ch. 1
 - 13 *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press: 1968), p. 80. Italics added by myself. Concerning the last sentence, I use the alternative translation in the footnote of Burton.
 - 14 Ibid., p.84
 - 15 Ibid. p.84
 - 16 Ibid., p. 49
 - 17 See my *Annäherung an das taoistische Verständnis von Wissenschaft. Die Epistemologie des Lao Tses und Tschuang Tses*, in F. Wallner, J. Schimmer, M. Costazza, editors, *Grenzziehungen zum Konstruktiven Realismus*, WUV Universitätsverlag, Wien, 1993
 - 18 Ibid., pp. 77-78
 - 19 I have developed Taoist practical methodology for knowing Tao in *Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism*, pp. 43-58
 - 20 Ibid., p. 50
 - 21 Ibid., p. 51
 - 22 *Genesis*, 1:27, in *The Jerusalem Bible, The Old Testament*, p.16
 - 23 "Therefore, when Tao is lost, there comes Teh(Creative Power). When Teh is lost, there comes Jen (Love). When Jen is lost, there comes Yih(Righteousness). When Yih is lost, there comes Lih(the Ritual)." Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, Ch. 38
 - 24 In Christianity , "hell" indicates this definitive state of self-exclusion from the communion with

- God and with the blessed. *Catechisme de l'église catholique*, (Mame/Plon, 1992), p.271
- 25 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), p. 4. Italics in the text.
- 26 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), p.1
- 27 *John*, 4, 21-24 in *The Jerusalem Bible, The New Testament*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p.153
- 28 *John*, 10, 34-35 in *Jerusalem Bible, New Testament*, p.170, In *Psalms*, 82,6, it reads, "I once said, You too are gods, son of the Most High, all of you." *Jerusalem Bible, Old Testament*, p.867.
- 29 In *Ps.* 118, *Serm.*, 18, 4, quoted from F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. II*, (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960), p.63
- 30 St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I,29, 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I,25
- 31 M.Heidegger, *Wozu Dichter*, in *Holzweg*, (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1938), p.248
- 32 M.Heidegger, *Identität une Differenz*, (Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1957), pp.60-63
- 33 Although in Taoism as religion, there is God in Heaven (Tian Dih), similar to Christian God; and in Buddhism there is also some tendency of divinization of Buddha in Mahasamghikas.
- 34 *Matthew*, 11, 16-17, in *Jerusalem Bible, New Testament*, p.32