

ABOUT HARMONY

Nicholas Campion, 'About Harmony', The Harmony Institute, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 22 February 2025.

Defining Harmony

Harmony is one of those huge concepts which, at its grandest, denotes a state of ecstatic oneness with the cosmos. Leo Tolstoy understood this when he put these words into the mouth of Pierre Bezukhov, the central character in his epic novel, *War and Peace*:

Don't I feel in my soul that I am a part of the vast, harmonious whole? Don't I feel that I constitute one link, that I make a degree in the ascending scale from the lower orders of creation to the higher ones... We must live, we must love, we must believe that we have life not only today on this scrap of earth but that we have lived and shall live for ever, there, in the Whole'.¹

In Pierre's transcendent vision, the smallest scale of existence is connected to the largest, all in a single system which occupies the whole of time and space: people, plants, stones, body, soul and stars are all interlinked and interconnected. Tolstoy's scheme has deep roots in classical thought, while the wider theory of Harmony also has separate origins in eastern wisdom, together with parallels in many so-called indigenous knowledge systems. The central question this book addresses is, if human beings are embedded in a wider natural order, what are the implications for governance, politics and societal behaviour in a range of areas, including business, health, education, architecture and food and farming.

Most, or all, cultures have a concept in which all things exist in a state of interconnection which, when everything is working well, are in balance. We are now using the word in two distinct yet often overlapping senses: Harmony (with a capital 'H') implies that there is an essential cosmic order written into the fabric of the universe, while harmony (with a small 'h') is a loose synonym for balance, peace and reconciliation. The concept is still of immediate relevance. As Julia Tao, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, wrote of China

Harmony, or *he*, has been a profound theme in Chinese thought since earliest times – profound in ontological, ethical and religious senses. At the same time, issues of harmony and harmony are also central themes in philosophical and political discussions in East Asia.²

¹ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics Version, 1982), Book Two, Part Two, Chapter 12, p. 455.

² Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, 'Why governance for harmony?' in Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, *Governance for Harmony in Asia and Beyond* (London Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-11 (P. 4).

The word *harmonia* itself is Greek and means ‘fitting together’.³ Hence music sounds harmonious when the notes fit together. Relationships are harmonious when people fit together. The world is then harmonious when people, animal plants, air, water and earth fit together. The Sanskrit equivalent is *irmah* meaning arm, or *rtih* meaning ‘manner, mode’, while the Latin is *ars* meaning ‘art, skill or craft’. Harmony therefore arises when an arm connects to a body, or a mode or manner of behaviour reflects the whole, or an artist or craftsman creates work which embodies an interconnected universe.

Two words used in India as similes for Harmony are *avirodha* or *sahita*, which refer to the smooth, pleasant and non-contentious functioning together of two or more things. The Buddha often spoke of the need and also the desirability of harmony within and between groups of people. Some of the things contributing to what he called ‘the progress of a society’ (*aparihāniya dhamma*) are the ability ‘to meet together in harmony, adjourn in harmony and conduct business in harmony’.⁴ The meaning of *avirodha* is clearly congruent with Harmony:

Avirodha (अविरोध) refers to “not being in contradiction with”, according to the Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā: the eighth chapter of the Mahāsaṃnipāta (a collection of Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtras).—Accordingly, “How then, son of good family, does the Bodhisattva who has attained memory never forget? Son of good family, the Bodhisattva attains memory (*dhāraṇī*) by purifying his memory. What then is the purification of memory? Son of good family, there are thirty-two purifications of memory. What are the thirty-two? [...] (21) never rejecting even the six defilements; (22) not giving up the six ways of politeness; (23) practicing the dharma without thought which is hostile towards all living beings; (24) not being in contradiction with dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda-avirodha*); [...]”.⁵

In China, the Mandarin word *he* (和), is now often taken as a synonym for harmony, although there are other terms which can provide complementary meanings. In modern Arabic M. A. Rashed identifies the synonym for ‘harmony’ or ‘to be in harmony’ as *tanāghum*, while David Rubin talks of three individual Hebrew terms – *shalom* (or *shalom*; ‘peace’), *yachad* (‘together’), and *tifereth* (‘beauty’ or ‘splendour’) – as representing different aspects of harmony.⁶

³ See the discussion in Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, ‘ARMONIA: FITTING TOGETHER IN A PLURAL WORLD’, *Armonia Journal*, 10 March 2017, <https://armoniajournal.com/2017/03/10/armonia-fitting-together-in-a-plural-world/> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁴ T.W. Rhys Davids (ed.), *Digha Nikāya* (London: J.E. Carpenter, 1890-1911), 1,74, cited in *Guide to Buddhism*, ‘Harmony’, <https://www.buddhism2z.com/content.php?id=166> [accessed 20 January 2024].

⁵ ‘Avirodha: 12 definitions’, *Wisdom Library*, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/avirodha> [accessed 21 January 2024].

⁶ M. A. Rashed, ‘Harmony in Islamic Cosmology: Subjugation, Sujūd and Oneness in Islamic Philosophical Thought’, in *The Harmony Debates*, ed. Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia

A standard up-to-date working definition of Harmony, designed to address contemporary concerns, is composed by David Cadman, an honorary Harmony Professor of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David:

Harmony is an expression of wholeness, a way of looking at ourselves and the world of which we are part. It's about connections and relationships. The emotional, intellectual and physical are all connected. We are connected to our environments, both built and natural; and all the parts of our communities and their environments are connected, too. Harmony asks questions about relationship, justice, fairness and respect in economic, social and political relationships. As an integrative discipline it can be expressed in ideas and practice.⁷

By asking questions we avoid the trap of assuming that there are fixed answers and leave the way open to pragmatic solutions. Another framing concept is therefore Karl Popper's notion of the 'open' society, which is characterised by liberal values and democracy, freedom of speech and critical inquiry.⁸

In summary Harmony can be identified in a few simple points:

1. All things are part of an interconnected whole.
2. There is therefore an underlying order in the universe.
3. When the system is functioning well then it is harmonious.
4. All change is cyclical.
5. Therefore some points in the cycle are disharmonious
6. Therefore the purpose of human activity should be to minimise disharmony and maximise harmony.

Of course, this is not as simple as it sounds. We may ask whether the presence of disharmony is an integral part of the structure of Harmony. There are also questions as to what constitutes appropriate human responses to disharmony. The reason for seeing Harmony as an appropriate framework for thinking about sustainability is that ecological theory also works on the basis that all things are part of an interconnected whole. Our exploration of Harmony as a framework for sustainability has two recent starting points.

The first starting point is the book *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World* published 2010 and written by the then Prince of Wales, now King Charles III, the

Centre Press, 2020) pp. 181-192; David Rubin, 'Harmony and Judaism', in *The Harmony Debates*, ed. Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 155-174.

⁷ David Cadman, 23 May 2017, cited in Nicholas Campion, 'Introduction', in Nicholas Campion (ed.) *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 17-29 (p. 22).

⁸ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, rev. edn. (2 vols, London and New York: Routledge, 1986 [1945, 1957]).

environmentalist Tony Juniper, who was then Director of Friends of the Earth UK and is now Chair of English Nature, and Ian Skelly. The King is UWTSD's Patron and Tony Juniper is an Honorary Harmony Professor of Practice. The book was the catalyst for the formation of the University's Harmony Institute. It began with a note of existential urgency:

This is a call to revolution. The Earth is under threat. It cannot cope with all that we demand of it. It is losing its balance and we humans are causing this to happen.⁹

The book then went on to explore the applications of Harmony through the natural and built environments, including philosophical, cosmological and spiritual issues. It is the first comprehensive treatment of these questions since the seventeenth century.

The second starting point consists of two documents were issued by the United Nations. The first of these is the 2009 document on 'Harmony with Nature' (<http://harmonywithnatureun.org/>). The second consists of three references to harmony in the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in 2015 (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). In 'Harmony with Nature' the UN set out its goals and purpose:

Since 2009, the aim of the General Assembly, in adopting its nine resolutions on Harmony with Nature, has been to define this newly found relationship based on a non-centric relationship with Nature. The resolutions contain different perspectives regarding the construction of a new, non-anthropocentric paradigm in which the fundamental basis for right and wrong action concerning the environment is grounded not solely in human concerns.¹⁰

In 2019 the UN General Assembly requested that the President of the General Assembly,

Convene the tenth Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature to discuss and compare regional, national and local initiatives over the past decade, including actions and transformations in law, policy and education on Earth Jurisprudence, as well as to discuss the relationship between harmony with nature and the protection of biological diversity, and to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world in the context of sustainable development.¹¹

And passed a resolution which,

⁹ HRH the Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World* (London: Harper Collins, 2010), p. 3.

¹⁰ United Nations, 'Harmony with Nature', <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/> [accessed 3 Jan. 2024].

¹¹ United Nations, 'Harmony with Nature: Chronology', <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/chronology/> [accessed 3 Jan. 2024].

1. Encourages the experts of the Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network to carry out a study of the evolution over the past decade of regional, local and national initiatives on the protection of Mother Earth, as applicable, to be considered by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of the present resolution;

2. Recognizes that protecting and conserving ecosystems and avoiding harmful practices against animals, plants, microorganisms and non-living environments contributes to the coexistence of humankind in Harmony with Nature.¹²

The UN also introduces an astronomical perspective, reminding us that life on our planet is part of much wider systems, and extends from the smallest scale to the largest:

The solar system reminds us that, just as the Earth is not at the centre of the Universe, neither are we humans the centre of the Earth. We, along with the rest of the natural world, are all interconnected within the larger web of life.¹³

The common theme running through the concept of Harmony is interconnectedness: everything in the world is interconnected, and all things are ultimately dependent on all other things, whether seen as separate but interconnected items in themselves, or as part of a whole system, and we look at those models of society and the environment which seek solutions by understanding, interconnectedness, rather than tackling individual problems as if they exist by themselves independently of larger systems.

The notion of harmony is usually associated with music but, in the classical Greek conception, musical harmonies are a manifestation of an underlying Harmony in the structure of the universe. To follow this model, the reason that certain music is sweet and melodious and calms the soul is that it conforms to the geometrical and mathematical structure of the universe.

But we also talk about people living in harmony with each other, or in harmony with nature. From this perspective, it is said that if we recognise that order or conform to it, or live in harmony with it, as we might say, then existence is more balanced, peaceful, and generally pleasant. In a harmonious world, then people will be more contented, satisfied, at peace with themselves and each other.

The existence of an underlying order in the world is not in question. This is why we are able to exist physically: if there was no order then the universe would fall apart. The laws of physics have always been based on the concept of universal physical order, as epitomised in the modern world by Newtonian physics. By contrast, twentieth century 'new' physics, as articulated through relativity and quantum mechanics, has demonstrated that at – what we might considered to be a more fundamental level – the

¹² United Nations, 'Harmony with Nature: Chronology', <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/chronology/> [accessed 3 Jan. 2024].

¹³ United Nations, 'Harmony with Nature', <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/> [accessed 28 March 2020].

order of the natural world breaks down as we move first towards the atomic level, and then the world of quantum mechanics, in which uncertainty plays a huge role: particles may be waves and waves may be particles, and certain quantum phenomena may not occur until they are observed. However, a widespread response to the new physics holds that it reinforces concepts of universal interconnectedness.

That there are rhythms, cycles and patterns in the natural order is a product of the position of our planet Earth in the solar system, that it rotates on its own axis, and that it orbits the Sun, when it's smaller, satellite, the moon orbits the Earth. This produces the rhythms of light and dark, night and day, and of the seasons, along with the complete range of biological rhythms associated with these astronomical cycles. The existence of such cycles emphasises a basic paradox, that if all things exist in rhythms or waves or cycles, as demonstrated most visibly in the seasons, then there is a constant alternation between growth and decay, birth, and death, ease and disease, comfort and discomfort, relaxation and tension. Ease and dis-ease can alternate. In the so-called 'Cosmic Cycle' of the Greek philosopher Empedocles (c.493-33 BCE) the universe alternates between two forces, Love, which binds everything together and Strife, which pulls things apart.: a peak of Love represents a peak of Harmony, and a peak of Strife coincides with a peak of Disharmony.

Plato, who was influenced by Empedocles, developed the concept of transcendent love, which we now know as Platonic love. This principle finds its way into religious traditions in such advice as 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.¹⁴ Sufi teachings also emphasise universal love.¹⁵ Some forms of Buddhism similarly emphasise universal Love. Other religious and philosophical teachings have similar statements, or texts which are now interpreted to indicate the power of universal love. The well-known Chinese system contrasts an active force, Yang, with a passive one, Yin. As for Love, it is central to Pierre's vision and is regarded by David Cadman as central to Harmony.¹⁶ Love with a capital 'L' is therefore a cosmic force which holds the universe together and a transcendental experience which enables people to contact love as a 'higher' principle, which might be referred to as divine love.¹⁷ On a personal level, love then becomes that mysterious attractive force which binds people together but is concerned with caring and giving, rather than selfish desire. As a practical measure, if we behaved to each other in terms of love, of selfless desire to support other people's interests, and of care and consideration for their welfare, rather than fear, suspicion, envy, irritation, or any other negative emotion, then the world would be a better and more Harmonious place.

That Harmony and Strife (or Disharmony) exist in a balanced and alternating relationship suggests that there can never be a final and fixed social or political state of Harmony. There can therefore never be a Utopia, or a final state of existence as

¹⁴ Gospel according to Mark, 23.31.

¹⁵ Zargar, Cyrus Ali, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi* (University of South Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁶ David Cadman, 'Love in Action', Parliament of World Religions, 16 November 2021. <https://davidcadmanatwork.com/2021/11/16/love-in-action/> [accessed 22 Feb 2025]

¹⁷ See David Cadman, *In Order to Love*, Zig Publishing, 2023 for a discussion of this.

envisioned by many groups, especially in the West. The political implications of Harmony have been explored by Julia Tao, Anthony B.L. Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, who write,

Harmony has become a major challenge for modern governance in the 21st century because of the multi religious, multi relational and multiethnic character of our increasingly globalised society. Governments all over the world are facing growing pressure to weave the myriad subcultures and the diverse components that constitute their modern pluralistic communities into harmony to ensure peaceful coexistence and to promote human flourishing. Ironically, harmony as a concept has been given much less importance and emphasis than conflict or disharmony in conventional political and social theories, particularly in the West, where politics is seen to be primarily concerned with resolving social conflicts.¹⁸

They point out the tension between a politics based on individual rights and one based on community, runs through contemporary thought, argue that one based on individual rights alone is inadequate, and that 'the development and achievement of communal harmony pose a grave threat to totalitarianism'.¹⁹

Harmony Principles

If we try to identify the different components which constitute Harmony, we can up with a different number – perhaps, five or six or seven, perhaps more. It depends whether we consider the ways in which such different components overlap or are distinct. It therefore makes no sense to talk about the principles of Harmony as if there are a set number. David Cadman stresses that we should talk about 'Principles' without the definite article ('the') in order to stress the need for a pragmatic and flexible approach.

David Cadman gives the following list of some Harmony Principles:

wholeness,
connection and interdependence,
diversity within wholeness,
cycles of time and season,
patterns and rhythms,
reciprocity and mutuality
justice and lawfulness.²⁰

¹⁸ Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, 'Why governance for harmony?' in Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, *Governance for Harmony in Asia and Beyond* (London Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-11 (p. 3).

¹⁹ Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, 'Why governance for harmony?' in Tao, Julia, Anthony B.L.Cheung, Martin Painter and Chnyang Li, *Governance for Harmony in Asia and Beyond* (London Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-11 (p. 4).

²⁰ David Cadman, 'Principles of Harmony', in *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future*, edited by Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 43-5 (p. 43).

The requirement for justice and lawfulness is crucial and represents an insistence that a politically Harmonious system requires the rule of law. We can also immediately see how there is considerable overlap between different items in the list. Richard Dunne (Honorary Professor of Practice at UWTSD) and Emilie Martin have a slightly different list which mainly involves varying the names for Cadman's principles, evidence that there is no standard formula, and adding geometry, health and adaptation, the last one interesting in that it rejects dogma and challenges ideas around fixed positions:

the principle of Geometry;
the principle of the Cycle;
the principle of Interdependence;
the principle of Diversity;
the principle of Adaptation;
the principle of Health,
the principle of Oneness.²¹

Over the centuries the principle of Harmony as interconnectedness and balance has been applied obviously to music, but also to politics, business, farming, health, religion and spirituality, cosmology, the arts in addition to music, and individual conduct.

Sustainability

Our work at UWTSD has firmly connected Harmony to sustainability.²² Yet a major question mark hangs over the meaning and uses of the word sustainability. The UN's Harmony with Nature programme seeks,

to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world in the context of sustainable development.²³

The link of sustainability to development, as made by the UN is controversial and is a subject of debate.²⁴ The options range from:

²¹ Richard Dunne and Emilie Martin. 'Harmony in Education: Applying the principles of natural systems to learning', in *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future*, edited by Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 475–96 (p. 486).

²² Nicholas Campion (ed.) *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), Nicholas Campion, 'Adventures in Space: Harmony, Sustainability and Environmental Ethics', in Nicholas Campion and with Chris Impey, *Imagining Other Worlds: Explorations in Astronomy and Culture* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2018), pp. 69-85.

²³ United Nations, 'Harmony with Nature: Chronology', <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/chronology/> [accessed 3 Jan. 2024].

²⁴ Editorial: 'GDP at 70: why genuinely sustainable development means settling a debate at the heart of economics', *Nature* **620**, p, 246 (2023), 9 August 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-02509-5>.

1. Economic development is incompatible with sustainability.²⁵
2. Economic development is compatible with sustainability as long as it (economic development) is limited.²⁶
3. Economic development is required for sustainability as long as it (economic development) is carefully targeted.²⁷

Sustainability is also often used in relation to individual areas of activity which might or might not be consistent with activities which would normally be considered environmentally friendly or ecologically sensitive. For example, we can talk of a sustainable arms industry (<https://www.asd-europe.org/sustainability-and-the-european-defence-industry>), the logic being that a strong defence policy guarantees stability and stability is necessary for wider environmental sustainability. Generally, a Harmony approach to sustainability will focus on whole systems rather than individual activities, but we have to recognise that the whole consists of individual parts. The consequence is that we have to ask difficult questions, as David Cadman wrote, and there may be no easy answers. On the relationship between Harmony and sustainability he asked:

So, is harmony a tool of sustainability or does sustainability sit within principles of harmony? My view is that sustainability, in either its wider or more narrow form, cannot be explored other than in the context of harmony. It is a circle within a circle... perhaps this is something we should explore together.²⁸

Solutions to specific policy questions may therefore be pragmatic and explore the evidence pertaining to individual cases.

As a universal philosophy, Harmony's implications and applications are also necessarily universal. They can embrace all phenomena, collective and individual, human and non-or other-than-human. They can provide a model for action, but always in a context of critical inquiry and thought.

²⁵ Federico Demaria, 'Why economic growth is not compatible with environmental sustainability', *The Ecologist*, 22nd February 2018, <https://theecologist.org/2018/feb/22/why-economic-growth-not-compatible-environmental-sustainability>.

²⁶ Mark Diesendorf, 'We can achieve sustainability – but not without limiting growth', *The Conversation*, 29 November 2015. <https://theconversation.com/we-can-achieve-sustainability-but-not-without-limiting-growth-51032#:~:text=Unfortunately%20the%20qualitative%20result%2C%20that%20growth%20and%20sustainability,compatible%2C%20is%20only%20true%20under%20very%20restrictive%20conditions>. [accessed 3 January 2024].

²⁷ Dimitri Zenghelis, 'Sustainability Is Not Only Compatible with Growth, It Requires It – But Only with Targeted Innovation', *Forbes*, Mar 19, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dimitrizenghelis/2021/03/19/can-we-be-green-and-grow/> [accessed 3 January 2024].

²⁸ Cadman, David, 'Principles of Harmony', in *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future*, edited by Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 43–5 (p. 45).

