

# Transversality, Harmony, and Humanity between Heaven and Earth

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Diogenes  
2014, Vol. 60(1) 97–104  
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DOI: 10.1177/0392192113519953  
dio.sagepub.com  


*True theory does not totalize, it multiplies.*  
Gilles Deleuze

*Benevolence (仁) is akin to music.*  
Confucius

*All music is harmonious, because harmony is the primary condition of musical being.*  
Mikel Dufrenne

We are not one but many. We are living in the world of multitude which is both interhuman and interspeciesistic. This is the world of multiculturalism which has been ushered into globalization and into a brave new world. The task of public philosophy, as I see it, is to engage in dialogue concerning the national and global issues of exigency at public forums. The most exigent issue of our time is the question of seeking and establishing peace in the midst of different cultures or civilizations on the one hand and between global humanity and nature on the other. This essay explores the role of transversality as a radically new way of thinking in the face of multiculturalism and globalization where no one culture or one species should play a hegemonic role over the others whether it be empire-building or anthropocentric domination (speciesism).

The philosopher begins anew by inventing new concepts to come to grips with the world always in transition. In today's multicultural and globalizing world, public philosophy is in dire need of inventing new concepts to explore changing realities. New concepts are always already implicated in changing realities themselves. I suggest that transversality is a seminal concept. It is conceived of as a practical response befitting for transforming the world of multiculturalism and globalization in the spirit of Deleuze for whom 'true theory' does not totalize but instead multiplies. Ambiguity in the etymological sense of 'bothness' rather than 'either/or' comes with the conceptual territory of multitude which had no ending or is 'unfinalizable.' In the spirit of Husserl who invoked in the mid-1930s the metaphor of the phoenix rising from the ashes in describing his seminal

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phenomenology of the everyday socio-cultural life-world (Lebenswelt), Calvin O. Schrag conceives of transversality as replacing universality for our new millennium. As a radically new way of thinking, it may be likened to digging (laterally) a new hole in another place rather than digging (vertically) the same hole deeper and deeper with no exit in sight. To sum up: by way of transversality, I take 'stakes' as golden opportunities for the creation of a new ontology, a new culture, a new ethics, and a new politics, that is, of a new world.

In its origin, transversality is a geometric concept which refers to the crossing (X-ing as in the crossing sign of railroad tracks) of two diagonal lines in any given rectangle that are symbolized in the Greek letter  $\chi$  (chi) from which the world 'chiasm' in the sense of intertwining originates. As a philosophical matrix, transversality contextualizes 'truth' both across and beyond the boundaries of individual cultures, individual species (human and nonhuman), individual disciplines, and individual sensorium. In the paradigm of transversality, the question of 'truth' is sought cross-culturally. Thus transversality is spelled 'trans(uni)versality.' The face of universality is often veiled or masked in European ethnocentrism. It cannot be otherwise because all philosophy, European or otherwise, invents universality or universal truth as cultural hermeneutics or cultural politics. Taking the cue from Michel Foucault in his 1978 visit to Japan, a new philosophy for the future will emerge from the meeting or confluence without coincidence of the East and the West. By maximizing the global cross(X)-flow and ex/change of ideas and values, transversality also dif/fuses globalization as a non-reductive and non-ethnocentric process, i.e., a non-predatory event which results in the hybridity or creolization of ideas and values. Hybridity will be neither entirely Eastern nor entirely Western but something in-between (中, naka, in Japanese). In other words, it will be intercultural. In addition, it will be interspeciesistic, interdisciplinary, and intersensorial.

The most befitting image of the newly emerging face of transversality may be the famous rustic wooden statue of the Buddhist priest Hoshi, now housed in Kyoto National Museum, whose face marks a new dawn of awakening (悟り, satori) which signals the beginning of a new global regime of ontology, culture, ethics, and politics. From the crack of the middle (中 naka) of the old face of the Hoshi statue, there emerges an interstitial, liminal face that signifies a new transmutation and transvaluation of the existing world. The icon of the emerging new face symbolizes the arrival of Maitreya (the future 'Awakened One') or Middle Way – that third enabling term of transversality which is destined to navigate the turbulent waters of intercultural border crossings.

Harmony actively promotes peace. In other words, as music fosters harmony, peace is a music of harmony. By way of harmony, we promote peace, that is, the harmonics of relationships both interhuman and interspeciesistic. The following formula sketches the tripartite relationships of transversality, harmony, and humanity:

Transversality ↔ Harmony ↔ Humanity between Heaven and Earth

The acoustic is what characterizes the sound of music. It is inherently simultaneous, globalizing, synthesizing, and socializing, whereas the visual is sequential, localizing, analytic, and isolating. So color and sound are two radically different modalities of organizing the human sensorium and the world. There is a qualitative difference in human experience between the visual and the acoustic. As music is the organized movement of sound, the spatiality of sound (soundscape) is most fully actualized in the tones of music. Color does not separate itself from the object, whereas sound separates itself from its source. In other words, color is a dependent attribute of an object, whereas sound is not. Color is locatable and localizable in one single position with the object, whereas sound, once separated from its source, has no definite topological property or determination although its source is locatable. Sound travels in no one direction, it travels in all directions. It is neither 'here' nor 'there' but everywhere (i.e., placeless or ubiquitous).

To distinguish between color (seeing) and sound (hearing) is not to say that they are disconnected. For example, we speak of the coloration of tones and the tonality of colors. In fact, there is the sociability or synaesthesia of the senses. According to Helen Keller who was born deaf and blind, it is difficult for us to keep separate the 'tuned-in' functions of the five senses, since they assist and reinforce one another. We hear views, see tones, taste music, smell storms, etc. Only in terms of the body as the participatory locus of perception do we come to understand Maurice Merleau-Ponty's deep notion that the world is made of the same stuff as the bodily perception. In each act of perception, the body participates in the world. Each perception is an instance or moment of the sensuous unity (i.e., synaesthesia), and it is enclosed in the synergic work of the body, that is, intersensorial. The body is the carnal field in which perception becomes localized as seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting this or that in particular. The body is a sentient subject, never an inert mass. As such the body as flesh is capable of 'authoring' the world first before 'answering' it.

Harmony promotes the sacrament of peaceful coexistence among not only all men and women but also all nonhuman beings and things in the cosmos. The idea of peaceful coexistence may be called synchronicity or the continuum of Interbeing. By synchronicity or Interbeing, I mean that in the cosmos everything is connected to everything else and nothing exists and can exist in isolation.

Harmony is the quintessence of music which is consummately aesthetic because all other arts aspire to attain the condition of music. Beethoven went so far as to claim that music is a higher revelation than all philosophy and wisdom put together. For Robert Burton whose seventeenth-century work *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is encyclopedic, music is a tonic for the malady of the saddened soul and sorrowful heart. Music therapy, according to him, surpasses the prescription of philosophers and physicians. In his first major work *The Birth of Tragedy*, the youthful Friedrich Nietzsche, who was trained in Greek philology, valorized music – perhaps in the ancient Greek sense of μουσική (performing arts) that includes oral poetry, drama, dance, and music – as the consummate aesthetic. For him, music alone can justify the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. In this sense, the world is 'measured' (in the musical sense of μέτρον) by the aesthetic of music whose primary condition of being is to attune ourselves to the rhythm of the world both human and nonhuman. By way of mood (Stimmung) – which is related to Stimme (voice) – humans, according to Heidegger, find themselves as 'Being-in-the-world' (in-der-Welt-sein) which is both the world with other humans (Mitwelt) and the enviroing world (Umwelt).

The Greek sense of the mathematical, too, was tied to music. In the Pythagorean genre, the musical and the mathematical work together toward the unifying concept of harmony. For Pythagoras and ancient Pythagoreans, the idea that 'all is number' or 'number is all things' was meant to be the perfect order of the universe (uni-verse) in terms of invisible and temporal harmonia. In the Renaissance, too, the Vitruvian figure inscribed in a square and a circle was a symbol of symphonia between microcosm and macrocosm, and Leonardo da Vinci obtains a harmonious smile in the Gioconda (Mona Lisa) by means of the geometry of a circle. So with Pythagoras the ratio or harmonic proportionality of the octave (1:2), of the fourth (4:3), and of the fifth (3:2) was meant to perfect the ordering of the mathematical. The sum of the numbers in these ratios – 1, 2, 3, and, 4 – is 10, which is for Pythagoras the perfect number. To Pythagoras, this mathematical order came as a revelation of the harmonia of the natural (heavenly) and the moral world – each individually and both together known as the 'music of the spheres.' Ancient Pythagoreans also spoke of the 'holy fourfoldness' (Τετρακτύς) of water, air, earth, and fire – the union of the spheres.

What is most interesting and relevant to our discussion here is that harmony is an ultimate pitch of musicality: it constitutes the keyboard of understanding reality as social process (i.e., Interbeing), for only where there is sociality, is there reality and where there is no sociality, there is no reality. This is the quintessential ontological principle of Sinism that includes Confucianism,

Daoism, and Chan/Zen Buddhism in China, Korea, and Japan. I have been using the term relational ontology to characterize the Sinic way of doing and thinking. As music is a 'family' of sounds, harmony as a musical pitch is not the unitariness of the undifferentiated but a polyphonic chord or orchestration of the differentiated many.

For Confucius, benevolence (ren, 仁) is akin to music (see Liji) which incorporates harmony. As the loftiest virtue of Confucian virtue ethics, ren is to harmonize the whole of humanity. Thus ren has a cosmopolitan outlook. By virtue ethics, I mean that ethics which is neither deontological (Kantian) nor utilitarian (Benthamite). As the aesthetic is the harmony between humanity and nature, so is the good the harmonious relationship between one person and another: not only is the ethical grounded in the aesthetic, but also harmony combines the theme of the aesthetic and the ethical. Harmony, therefore, is the principium not only of the aesthetic but also of the social.

There is indeed a kinship between ren and music. We can speak of the 'music of humanity' – to borrow the most well-chosen expression of Herbert Fingarette.<sup>1</sup> However, the cosmopolitanism of ren is rooted in filial piety (孝, xiao), that is, ren is a 'rooted cosmopolitanism.' If the 'music of filial piety' may be likened to playing a duet, trio, quartet or quintet, then the 'music of humanity' is comparable to playing a full orchestra. Filial piety exemplifies the tonality of Confucian virtue ethics as well as relational ontology. Among five relationships (五行, wuxing) in Confucianism, filiality is most basic and primary. Before ren is fully played out, one must first fulfill filial piety. Indeed, they are not separate but two aspects of a single concern. To use the language of Confucius's justification of the primacy of filial piety, one must start from a place which is near in order to travel a far distance or one must begin from the lower ground in order to scale a lofty height.

While I was reading the nature of Greco-Roman religion many years ago, I stumbled on the interesting and appealing way of defining piety (pietas) as 'absolute reciprocity.' The story of piety goes as follows: a mother was doing her time in a prison which was built on the ruins of an old temple. Her 'faithful' daughter was breast-feeding to nourish her mother as she was nourished once by her mother when she was an infant. This act of reciprocity is called piety. The Wellcome Institute and Museum of the History of Medicine in London houses a collection of twenty-four ivory engravings which illustrate twenty-four exemplary deeds of filial piety. One of them is the specter in which a 'faithful' daughter is breast-feeding her aged father while her two little children are looking on. This embodied act of nourishing is an exemplar of filial piety which incorporates the spirituality of giving in return. From a Sinic perspective, all moral deeds are performative, that is to say, they are embodied acts when they are prescribed and performed particularly in rituals. Filial piety is no exception.

In our discussion of harmonia mundi (world harmony), there are two genres: interhuman and interspeciesistic relationships (homopiety and geopiety) which form an interrelated circle. So much for homopiety. Now we move to geopiety which is concerned with questions of ecology or the environment (Umwelt). Ecology or the science of the earth as a household has rightly become our 'ultimate concern.' It has a religious magnitude. It has turned into the question of 'to be or not to be.' The ecological crisis may be seen as nature's mutiny (silent revolt) against humanity. It persists: there is no waning sign to it. It is a permanent fixture of the human condition everywhere. Alarming this earth, our dwelling place, has progressively become an inhospitable, precarious, ruinous, unsustainable, and even deadly place for all earthlings both large and small, human and nonhuman. Now it manifests itself in the form of global warming. The ancient Hindu scriptural saying of Bhagavad Gita captures the dire predicament of the earthly condition today: 'I am become death.' Most generally speaking, it is the arrogance of the human species (speciesism)<sup>2</sup> over the rest of creation that must be blamed for the end of nature or earth. In such condition, the ethics of geopiety precedes that of homopiety simply because the end of the earth necessarily signifies the end of history but not the other way round.

What Rodin's sculptural masterpiece 'The Cathedral' is to the sacrament of interhuman coexistence, M. C. Escher's *Verbum* is to the sanctity of interspeciesistic relationships. It signifies the Biblical notion that 'in the beginning was the word,' and that word was Interbeing or the ecological continuum of Being. Thus the 'first law' of ecology is predicated upon the idea that in the cosmos everything is connected to everything else.

According to the Homeric 'Hymn to Hermes' in ancient Greek thought, the god Hermes invented the lyre out of a tortoise shell, the meaning of whose myth is synonymous with the discovery of the universe as the sounding orbit and harmony. Music as the epitome of an aesthetic phenomenon in relation to ecology is embodied in the voice of Orpheus which is the combined voice of music and (oral) poetry at once. As the legend goes, Orpheus was a musician or a player of the lyre (i.e., a 'lyricist' par excellence). With his music, Orpheus was able to make the whole of nature or – to use the Sinic expression – 'ten thousand things' enchant (*en/chant*) and dance in delight (*de/light*). Orpheus the Thracian musician made rocks, mountains, streams, trees, forests, animals, and birds dance. His voice makes ecology efficacious. His musical instrument – lyre – carries a promise of the eternity of our harmony with nature. In his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Rainer Maria Rilke declares (or *de/clears*) that 'das Gesang ist Dasein' (singing is existence). Shakespeare's 'song' in *King Henry VIII* (Act III, Scene I) honors Orpheus:

Orpheus with his lute made trees,  
And the mountain tops that freeze,  
Bow themselves when he did sing:  
To his music plants and flowers  
Ever sprung, as sun showers  
There had made a lasting spring.  
Every thing that heard him play,  
Even the billows of the sea,  
Hung their heads, and then lay by.  
In sweet music is such art,  
Killing care and grief of heart  
Fall asleep, or hearing die.

It is the same legend of Orpheus which inspired Claudio Monteverdi to compose an opera (*Orfeo*) – that integral art form which infuses, after the fashion of Greek μουσική, singing, orchestration, drama, and dance. Later, Christoph W. Gluck and Jacques Offenbach followed the footsteps of Monteverdi. Franz Liszt composed a symphonic poem called *Orpheus*; and Igor Stravinsky celebrated Orpheus in a ballet form which is paradigmatic to what we have above called the model of Orphean dance. Above all, *Symphony No. 6, the Pastoral Symphony*, of Beethoven is, I think, most telling. It is Beethoven's animated portrayal of nature and the life of the countryside: the fields, meadows, woods, and streams; a chorus of the nightingale, quail, cuckoo, and yellowhammer; a storm; a peasant's festival (a village dance or fair); and a shepherd's hymn of thanking at the passing of the storm. It is irresistible to insert here that Botticelli's *Primavera* in its artistic content takes after the rhythmic modality of music and dance.

In Japanese culture, there is no lack of the musicality of soundscape. Take the example of a famous haiku by the seventeenth-century Japanese poet, who studied Zen and also revolutionized the modern Japanese haiku in the condensed and elegant 5-7-5 syllabic formula:

古池や The old pond  
蛙飛びこむ A frog jumps in,  
水のおと The sound of the water.

Indeed, 'small' is elegant and beautiful. The sonorous ubiquity of the water when the frog jumps is truly metaphysical: it signifies a concordant continuum of all the cosmic elements. So the simplicity and wilderness of oto (音, sound) is the most elemental, all-encompassing principium of the haiku. The Zenish splendor of the simple and wild in this Basho's haiku airs and echoes the sonorous mood of 'serenity' (or what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit* in contrast to *Gestell*) – the seasonal serenade of Being or Nature/'that which is as it is' (自然, *shi zen*). The harmony of the elements is the great continuum of Being where the reverberation of the water's sound is perceived by the poet in the little creature's consonance with nature or the whole cosmos as the background of tranquility, serenity, or 'beautific repose.' Furthermore, there is a Japanese counterpart to the Greek legend of Orpheus the musician: it is extraordinarily interesting to discover that the Japanese legend of Semimaru parallels the legend of Orpheus. Semimaru is an archetype of the performing artist and a 'patron saint' of the performing arts (μουσική) in Japan, and he inspired the mood of composing many poems, tales, and plays in the history of Japanese literature. As the legend goes, Semimaru was a blind beggar lutenist whose gift for music compensates for his blindness. Thus this legendary 'composite individual' personifies the spiritual 'sight' of the blind. The most allusive part of Semimaru is the name itself. Etymologically, it is a composite of semi and maru. Semi (蟬) is the Japanese word for the singing insect called cicada whose chorus in summer delights the young and maru (丸) indicates the round or spherical as in the encirclement of sound or the image of 'round' which Aldo Leopold creates in his Round River. Maru is also used in a second component of male names and ending of the names of ships.

In his conceptualization of Interbeing, Watsuji Tetsuro integrates interhuman relationships (倫理学, *Rinrigaku*: Ethics) with their environing (climatic) milieu (風土, *Fudo*: 'wind'/'land') after the fashion of feng-shui (風水: 'wind'-'water,' or geomancy) which may be called a Sinic eco-art. What Being and time are to Heidegger, Interbeing and space are to Watsuji. This does not mean that for Watsuji time does not exist. Nor does this mean that space does not exist for Heidegger either. On the contrary, Watsuji's basic premise is that time and space take place together. They are a sort of double helix, as it were: human existence is neither exclusively temporal nor exclusively spatial; it is both, that is, chronotopical. In human existence, time and space are coeval. For Watsuji, human existence is infused with time and space.

Ningen (人間), the human, has one foot in the *Mitwelt* and the other in the *Umwelt*. He insists that the climate does not exist apart from history. Nor does history exist apart from the climate. Watsuji plays out the concept of ningen or being human as it is composed of two sinograms: 'human' (人: *nin* or *hito*) and 'betweenness' (間: *gen* or *aidagara*): etymologically, to be human is to be necessarily relational or interhuman (*Mitmenschlichkeit*). Watsuji's philosophy of ningen is close to Martin Buber's formulation of the interhuman (*das Zwischenmenschliche*). In Buber's relational ontology, it is important to note that the 'I' of 'I-Thou' and the 'I' of 'I-It' can never be the same 'I' because the 'I' in these two primary relationships is always and necessarily defined in relation to and in interaction with the 'Thou' or 'It,' never by itself alone. From the standpoint of relational ontology, moreover, culture underwrites ningen or interhuman relationships. Humans create culture, and conversely culture molds humans. The question of 'what the human is' and that of 'what culture is' cannot be separated: one implicates the other. The American cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, sees that discovering heaven in a grain of sand is not a feat only poets (e.g., the poet William Blake) can achieve. To put it briefly: there is no human nature independent of culture – without men and women, no culture but, equally, without culture, no men and women. What is said about the *Mitwelt* should also be said about the *Umwelt* in defining ningen. The environmental crisis today intimates that not only does the climate (e.g., global warming) affect human existence and culture but also humans terribly affect the climate to the extent that Watsuji would have never imagined.

The earth is a ‘bodyword’ as much as the body is an ‘earthword.’ The damage that the Cartesian disembodied cogito (*ergo sum* or ‘I think therefore I am’) has done to the social, political, and ethical thinking of Western modernity is extensive and immeasurable. One does not have to be a woman or feminist to realize its effects. The body and the earth inscribe each other in/as one fleshfold. As such the body is quintessentially a place name, a name of location. But for the body, we would have no conception of space at all. There is the Sinic saying that the body and the land are not two. They are relational through and through. The American ecophilosopher Aldo Leopold equates his ‘land ethic’ with the soul and body of conservationism, with ‘an aesthetic harvest’ of things natural, wild, and free. As the mindscape is rooted in the landscape, the quality of wilderness is not only of outward nature but also of the moral vision of our inward soul. Herein lies the profound and prophetic vision of Leopold in defense of geopiety and more importantly the reason why the moral vision of nature must precede that of humanity or they complement each other. Leopold, I think, echoes the cosmological and moral vision of Zhang Zai (1022–1077) who lived in China across the Pacific Ocean almost nine centuries ago. I find the following classic inscription of Zhang most interesting and stunningly beautiful because they are not only cosmological in defining ‘humanity between heaven and earth’ but also framed in the truly Confucian terms of the family as the model of all relationality. In the ‘Western Inscription’ (西銘, Ximing), he inscribes: ‘Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.’

As the body is the material condition of human existence, both the social world (Mitwelt) and the natural world (Umwelt) are embodied phenomena in that we are connected to them by way of the body as the most basic medium of all relationships even prior to language. The body is not just the medium of communication, but it is communication. Ningen is not an incorporeal substance. The contemporary Chinese philosopher Li Zehou coined the neologism ‘subjectality’ (zhu/ti/xing, 主体性, in three sinograms) which is distinguished from ‘subjectivity’ – to the delight of Merleau-Ponty, I might add – in that the former is embodied/aesthetic, while the latter is idealized/epistemological. The aesthetic (αισθησις) and embodiment are familial terms because the former is the discourse of the latter. It is also worth noting that ‘lived experience’ (Erlebnis) in Japanese phenomenology is translated as taiken (体験) in two sinograms. The Chinese ti (体) and the Japanese tai (体) are one and the same sinogram body.

In conclusion: we come to a full circle. As Merleau-Ponty says, the end of a philosophy is the account of its beginning. We are living in the world of multitude which is both interhuman and interspeciesistic. We live in a web of relationships to which I gave the name Interbeing. The task of public philosophy – to reiterate – is to engage in dialogue concerning the public issues of exigency which I have identified as peace cum harmony for both interhuman and interspeciesistic relationships. In the globalizing world of multiculturalism, the value of transversality points to the lateral or cross-cultural exchange (ex/change) of ideas and values hopefully to transform the world into a better place to live for all humanity as earth-dwellers in peace and harmony not just among humans but with nonhumans as well. The task of public philosophy, in sum, is to cultivate the public mind concerning the contemporary issues of exigency and to awaken and heighten their urgent sense of responsibility for others both human and nonhuman.

## Notes

1. Let me quote a passage with an analogy to music as a performing art from Herbert Fingarette (1972: 53): ‘Acts that are li are not mere rote, formula-conforming performances; they are subtle and intelligent acts exhibiting more or less sensitivity to context, more or less integrity in performance. We would do well to

take music, of which Confucius was a devotee, as our model here. We distinguish sensitive and intelligent musical performances from dull and unperceptive ones; and we detect in the performance confidence and integrity, or perhaps hesitation, conflict, “faking,” “sentimentalizing.” We detect all this in the performance; we do not have to look into the psyche or personality of the performer. It is all “there,” public. Although it is there in the performance, it is apparent to us when we consider the performance not as “the Beethoven Opus 3” (that is, from the composer perspective), nor as a “public concert” (the li perspective), nor as a “post-Mozartian opus” (the style perspective), but primarily as this particular person’s performance (the personal perspective).<sup>7</sup>

2. It is interesting to note that speciesism has a double significance. In the first place, the idea of species as in the ‘human species’ is a visual one that comes from the Latin *specio* (to look or behold) and is related to the Greek idea (εἶδος), which comes from *voeó* (‘to see’), and to the Latin *videre*. In the second place, it is prejudice of the human species against other species. Speciesism is clearly manifested in human manipulation, exploitation, and domination of nature that culminates in the technological *Weltanschauung* of modern humanity.

## Reference

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