Soup, Harmony, and Disagreement*

ABSTRACT: *Is the ancient Confucian ideal of* he 和*, 'harmony,' a viable ideal in pluralistic societies composed of people and groups who subscribe to different ideals of the good and moral life? Is harmony compatible with accepting, even encouraging, difference and the freedom to think differently? I start with seminal characterizations of harmony in Confucian texts and then aim to chart ways harmony and freedom can be compatible and even mutually supportive while recognizing the constant possibility of conflict between them. I shall point out how the Confucian notion of harmony resonates with the Indian King Asoka's project of promoting religious pluralism. Along the way, I will make some comments of a 'meta' nature about the kind of interpretation I am offering of harmony in the Confucian texts and the use to which I am putting this interpretation by setting it in the context of societies that in important respects are quite different from the ones from which concepts of harmony originally emerged.*

Confucianism and Disagreement

It is not part of the usual interpretation of the *Analects* (see translation by Ames and Rosemont 1998) that the text accepts the inevitability of difference and disagreement. A widely accepted view of Confucianism is that its character ideals of the *junzi* 君子 (the morally noble person) and the *sheng ren* 聖人 (the sage) portray persons of perfected or at least extraordinary moral and political judgment, persons fit to be awarded high political office and fit to be followed by others. There are indeed passages that are understandably taken to confirm this view, e.g., Confucius's pronouncement that the virtue of the *junzi* is like the wind and the virtue of the common people like the grass: when the wind blows over the grass, it surely bends. The passage does not entail, however, that the judgment of the *junzi* is absolutely unerring, and even if it were, it does not entail that an

actual human being who fulfills or comes close to fulfilling the ideal will have unerring judgment. And consider *Analects* 15.36, which says that in striving to be *ren* 仁 or human-hearted, one should not defer even to one's teacher.[1] And in 2.9, Confucius says with an air of wonder that he can go a whole day of speaking with his favorite student, Yan Hui, without his raising an objection, a behavior that he would normally regard as a sign of stupidity. But when he observes what Yan Hui does on his own, he realizes that there is nothing slow about this student.

Consider that Zilu, the student with whom Confucius arguably has the next most affectionate relationship, is not afraid to challenge the Master, even sharply and rudely. When Confucius is asked what his first priority would be if he were to be entrusted with the governance of a state, he says it would be to rectify names. Zilu responds not only with disagreement but by characterizing Confucius's pronouncement as a strange thing to say and without apparent rationale. Confucius responds just as sharply by calling Zilu boorish and comparing him to the *junzi* who stay silent about things they do not understand. And yet these sharp exchanges, as Amy Olberding (2012: 142) has remarked, are embedded in a sustained relationship of shared affection. When Confucius falls quite ill (*Analects*: 9.12), Zilu gets his fellow students to act as if they were his retainers. After he feels better, Confucius chastises Zilu for putting up a pretense that would fool no one. But he then immediately affirms his affection for Zilu, saying that he would much rather die in the arms of his friends than in those of any retainers he might have even were his social rank much higher than it is.

Analects 9.30 provides some revealing detail on *why* we must accept the inevitability of difference:

> The Master said, 'You can study with some, and yet not necessarily walk the same path (*dao* 道); you can walk the same path as some, and yet not necessarily take your stand with them; you can take your stand with them, and yet not necessarily weigh things up in the same way. (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 133)

The journey to ethical excellence begins with studying (*xue* 學), a path such as the Confucian *dao* of human-heartedness (*ren* 仁), appropriateness (*yi* 義), and ritual propriety (*li* 禮). The next stage is taking a stand (*li* 立) by assuming a social position and performing the ritual activities appropriate to that position (for the link between ritual propriety and taking a stand, see *Analects* 8.8 and 20.3), and then, finally, exercising judgment about what to do by weighing (*quan* 權) multiple considerations that arise in a situation. Our journey is with others, and we should expect to differ with them even as we jointly pursue the realization of our shared aspirations. Weighing is a matter of judging how ethical considerations stack up against each other, especially when they conflict. Reasonable and informed people can judge differently given their value priorities and unique experiences in life. Given the usual stereotype of Confucianism, this point

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[1] My rendering of passages in the *Analects* is based on Ames and Rosemont 1998, with some changes based on my reading of the Chinese text 論語, available at the *Chinese Text Project* https://ctext.org/analects.

surprisingly resonates with John Rawls's characterization of the 'burdens of judgment': because our most cherished values do not come with the guarantee that their realization will be fully compatible and because we may be forced to restrict some values for the sake of others, we will inevitably differ over how best to balance our values (Rawls 1996: 56–57).

Analects 13.23 incorporates the acceptance of disagreement in its articulation of harmony: 'The exemplary person pursues harmony rather than sameness (*tong* 同); the small person does the opposite'. The contrast between harmony and sameness indicates that harmony makes constructive use of difference. How so? In the narrative history called the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, *Commentary of Zuo* (Zhaogong 昭公 'Duke Zhao': 20[2]), a high minister in the state of Qi named Yan Ying (晏嬰) delivers a speech about harmony. He is replying to the Duke of Qi, who says that only one minister in his retinue is in harmony with him. Master Yan responds that this minister only seeks *tong*, sameness or conformity with him. When the Duke asks what the difference is between harmony and sameness, Master Yan offers analogies to soup and to music. Here I will focus on soup, since I am a better cook than a musician.

The soup in question has meat or fish and vegetables. Because meat or fish has strong flavor, it needs to be balanced by and mingled with other flavors—vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum—in water and over a wood fire. Analogously, the ruler does not simply listen to a minister who seeks sameness with him. That would be like adding more water to an already watery soup. If a ruler's view about a matter has something wrong about it, a minister should point this out as well as whatever might be right about his view. Harmony, then, requires seeking out different points of view and integrating them into a constructive whole. The crucial question is whether harmony requires the ultimate elimination of disagreement in that constructive whole.

There are times when rulers and ministers can converge on a point of view that is stronger and more comprehensive than their initial perspectives. Let me call this dimension of harmony *shared understanding*. Ideally such understanding is reached on the basis of a shared vision of the sort of society to be realized. Confucius expresses the heart of this vision in a beautifully simple way when he says, 'I would like to bring peace and contentment to the aged, to share relationships of trust and confidence with my friends, and to love and protect the young' (*Analects*: 5.26, Ames and Rosemont 1998: 102). The ideal of harmony rests on the assumption that our great good as individual human beings lies in having relationships of this kind with each other, and accordingly it posits a fundamental compatibility between the most important interests of individuals.

This interpretation of the ideal is to be distinguished from the interpretation of Confucian harmony as subordinating the individual's interests to the group or community or society. As David Hall and Roger Ames (1998) have pointed out, the concept of subordinating the individual to the group presupposes that the individual exists apart from the social and is then subordinated to it. Instead, Hall

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[2] https://ctext.org/chun-qiu-zuo-zhuan/zhao-gong-er-shi-nian. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Ames and Rosemont (1998: 254–58, note 216).

and Ames assert the absence of such a separation in Chinese thought (Hall and Ames 1998: 24–26). This philosophical point dovetails with findings by cultural and social psychologists Markus and Kitayama 1991; Choi, Nisbett, and Norenzayan 1999) and anthropologists (Shweder and Bourne 1982) to the effect that in different parts of Asia people have a greater tendency to understand individuals in terms of the relationships they have with others and in the contexts of their activities.

The tendency to understand individuals in relational terms suggests that they cannot be conceived as fully separate from any group that supposedly subordinates them. Others in one's group may already be a part of the self. This conception of the person as overlapping in identity with others has normative implications for what constitutes the good of the individual and how that good relates to the good of others. One's relationship with others can form a part of one's good *as an individual*. One can have a compelling interest in their welfare and in one's relationship with them.

In Confucian ethics, the paradigm of this interdependence of individuals and their goods is the morally healthy family, where the good of each member includes and overlaps with the good of other members. When one family member flourishes, so do the others. This is not by any means to deny that an individual's interests may come into conflict with those of other members. In that event there must occur a continuous process of balancing and negotiation between the interests of individuals and those of the others to whom the individual is related. This process is conducted in the light of the interdependence of individuals and the various communities to which they belong, and the interdependence of the goods they are aiming for.

An individual's interests may sometimes have to yield to the interests of others, and a partial compensation for yielding is that a central part of that individual's good lies in the relationships with those others. On the other hand, the good of the family cannot be achieved without consideration of an individual's important interests. If those interests are urgent and weighty, they must become important interests of the family and can sometimes have priority in case of conflict. Sometimes, the difference can be split. Yielding to others must be balanced against having priority at other times. In thinking what to do about conflicts, we are guided by the thought that our own good involves the good of others and our relationships to them.

Consider the story about Shun 舜 the sage-king in the *Mengzi* (often known as the 'Mencius' because this was Mengzi's latinized name) 5A2 as an illustration of these points.[3] When Shun wanted to get married, it was at a time in his relationship to his parents when he knew that if he were to ask permission to marry, he would be denied. He decided to marry anyway without telling them. Mengzi defends what ordinarily would be a most unfilial act by saying that if Shun had let his parents deny him the most important of human relationships, it would have embittered him toward his parents. I understand Mengzi's reasoning to rest on the premise that Shun's good as an individual depends on both his desired marriage relationship and his relationship to his parents. For him to conform to his parents'

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[3] See *Mengzi*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/wan-zhang-i; for a translation see Bloom (2009: 98–99).

wishes is not only to deny him the first relationship but also to adversely affect the second. For the sake of both relationships he must assert his own good, which in the end is not separate from the good of his parents.

The Confucian concept of *yi* 義 is often translated as 'rightness', but this requires the proviso that the connotation should be that of appropriateness or fittingness. The connotation builds context into the notion of rightness. Something is right in the sense that it fits the situation at hand, in the way that how one makes soup must be fitted to the particular ingredients one has. *This* plum, not just any plum, must be married to *this* vinegar and salt. The proportions must be adjusted as one tastes the soup. Often one must work with whatever ingredients one has at hand, rather than the ones the recipe prescribes. One must be prepared to exercise discretion and depart from the recipe to get the ingredients into balance.

Analogously, harmony among human beings is not static but an *activity* of harmonizing that requires continuous mutual adjustment of the interests of individuals to each other (Li 2014). This activity is guided by *quan*, the exercise of discretion invoked by *Analects* 9.30. What constitutes a satisfactory adjustment cannot be specified independently of the particular interests at stake and the present and future nature of the relationships of all the relevant parties. Had less been at stake for Shun, it might not have been *yi* 義 (appropriate) for him to avoid asking for permission. Had his parents better reason to deny him permission, it might not have been *yi* for Shun to have done what he did.

Sometimes the Confucian conception of harmony is presented with an implied contrast between societies of East Asia on the one hand and societies of Western Europe and North America on the other hand. The former societies in which the ideal of harmony is especially salient could be expanded to include South Asia and Africa as well as those societies influenced by Confucian moral traditions such as China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. The latter societies were said to emphasize a conception of individuals as independent of their relationships to each other and, moreover, to value the defense of individual interests against the encroachment of those held by others. But there is increasing recognition that this cultural contrast is not accurate. In many places and groups, people acknowledge the interdependence of identity and goods. The 'interdependence ingredient' in various cultural soups is found in many societal kitchens, with the varying proportions relative to the ingredient of independence.

The cultural psychologists Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner (2013) have argued that even in cultures and groups that conceive of individuals as independent, there typically is recognition and valuing of interdependence, a desire to find a common good one shares with others, and recognition that independence as a trait is nurtured within the right sort of relationships. Markus and Conner see a pervasive variation in the extent to which people conceive of themselves as independent or interdependent and in how much they value independence versus interdependence, but this variation can be seen not only in comparison between the West and Asia but also between men and women, different socioeconomic classes, races and ethnicities, and regions of a single country such as the West (tending toward independence) and South (tending toward interdependence) of the United States.

The need to complicate the original cultural contrast illustrates that our most important moral disagreements with each other often involve differences in the priorities assigned to values that we share and that mutually support each other as well as exist in tension with one another. Harmony as shared understanding and the valuing of relationship is *not* merely a culturally local value.

We might imagine that Shun's parents did not accept the rightness of his getting married after they learned about it. But parents can get over what they first think they cannot accept from their children. It is in the spirit of *Analects* 9.30 to accept that disagreement is an enduring and ubiquitous feature of our journey with others. If achieving harmony with others were contingent on reaching complete agreement with them, harmony will never be forthcoming in this life. Even if we were to place the most power in the hands of a moral elite who had superior powers to exercise discretion in balancing values in cases of severe conflict, members of that elite would often disagree with one another.

There are forms of harmony that are *not* dependent on agreement. Family members and friends can love one another and vigorously disagree. Their relationships and their shared understandings on other matters can form the context in which their vigorous disagreements do not threaten the bonds between them. Let me call *accommodation* the dimension of harmony that strives for constructive relationship in the face of continuing disagreement. Accommodation, as a moral value, expresses respect and concern for disagreeing others. It is a second-order value in that it presupposes first-order moral disagreement.

As a value, accommodation has different facets: it includes an epistemic openness and preparedness to expand one's conception of the good and the right upon further understanding and appreciation of other ways of life; a willingness to act on one's own moral positions in ways that minimize or reduce potential damage to one's broader relationships to others who have opposing positions; and a willingness to compromise at least sometimes on what one might have achieved in realizing one's moral position for the sake of sustaining broader relationships with disagreeing others.

Accommodation as a moral value is required by a plausible conception of morality as having the function of structuring and promoting social cooperation (Wong 2006). To promote cooperation, societies foster a degree of convergence on moral values, but given the ubiquity of disagreement over how to interpret and prioritize shared values, there must be some will to stay in constructive relationship when convergence is absent. Otherwise cooperation is subject to the kind of crippling breakdowns we are witnessing in the United States.

There is another reason for the ubiquity of disagreement and thus the need for accommodation. Modern human societies are exceptional in the scale and complexity of cooperation achieved, where people of different types of specialized skills and cognitive and affective dispositions work together by coordinating through their different roles. Specialization of psychological type and role often brings with it difference in value orientation that produces disagreements. These differences in orientation make societies much more versatile, allowing their members to develop talents and skills along specialized channels that meet different kinds of challenges as they arise. Therefore, social cooperation creates

pressures for *both* convergence and divergence in moral orientation, and the complex mixture of commonality and difference in actual moralities reflects these pressures. Accommodation is both a shared moral value and is an important resort when divergence on other values threatens to undermine social bonds.

A Defense of the Interpretation Offered

Let me now briefly take up the metaturn to which I alluded in my introduction. It might be objected, and in fact has been objected by some, that my interpretation of harmony does not give sufficient weight to the preference for stability and conservatism that has been associated with Confucianism and that it does not give sufficient weight to the degree of 'shared understanding' that has been thought to be necessary for such stability and conservatism. It is certainly the case that Confucianism, as it became institutionalized in China, tilted toward *tong*, sameness. But scholarly and popular views of what is 'Confucian' have been heavily influenced by its having become official state ideology, starting from the Han dynasty. In the process of its institutionalization, Confucianism was fused with Legalism, a philosophy emphasizing centralized authority, harsh punishments, and skepticism about the power of trust between rulers and people to secure social order. The classical Legalists, such as Han Feizi, disdained the sort of balancing of interests illustrated by the Shun story. The result of fusing these unlikely bedfellows is a kind of moral authoritarianism that is quite at odds with the passages from the classical Confucian texts I have cited.

One virtue of paying serious attention to the seminal texts of a tradition is to recapture a set of possible and important meanings that get obscured by the tradition's being used to legitimate a set of compromised institutional arrangements. As is often the case, the content of the tradition bends or narrows under the pressure of such hard use. China's present political leader, Xi Jinping, demonstrates how enduring this dynamic is, through his invocations of 'harmony', for example, in a 2014 speech at UNESCO headquarters. He cites the *Analects* passage of harmony, not sameness, and the Yan Ying speech about soup but for the purpose of extolling the value of *global diversity* among civilizations. In the process he validates a considerably narrower conception of harmony within a single civilization that regularly represses critics and dissenters. Under Xi's conception of harmony China becomes a more uniform single ingredient that goes into the global soup.

This fusion of Confucianism with Legalism is neither coherent nor desirable. I do not mean to defend a pristine version of Confucianism because there is none. It is now commonplace to recognize the *Analects* as a confluence of different streams of thought from numerous individuals and groups over a long stretch of time, such that the Confucius of that text is more of a corporate person before there were corporations. The *Mengzi* not only defends Confucianism against its greatest rival during the ancient era, Mohism, but also incorporates to a very significant degree Mohism's overriding concern to satisfy the basic material needs of people. And the *Mengzi* does so, as Joanne Birdwhistell ([2007](#)) argues, through appropriating for its version of Confucian ethics gendered characteristics

associated with women, such as compassion and the nurturing of living beings, with patterns of development one cannot bend to one's will. In these regards, Mencian Confucian ethics differs significantly from the ethics of the *Analects* and from the ethics of the *Xunzi* that came later on. The *Xunzi*, in turn, incorporates concepts into its epistemology that we have come to associate with Daoism. And of course, the neo-Confucian movement of the Chinese Middle Ages significantly reinterpreted the classical texts, and, indeed, it designated which texts were canonical and which were not in the light of its own fusion of classical Confucian ethics with elements of Daoism and Buddhism.

My plea, therefore, is for recognizing the internal diversity and fluidity of great traditions of thought as embodied in their texts, each text containing within itself and in relation to others more than one viable set of coherent meanings. These meanings are eligible for fusion with meanings from other texts. Each set of meanings represents somewhat different directions of development for the tradition. Some of these meanings emerge as dominant, but others may later receive renewed attention because the problems of the times prompt attention to them. Confucianism shows itself to be a living and still viable tradition to the extent that its interpreters draw from the different possible lines of development with an eye toward their applicability to their own current situation. In her account of how Chinese thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries approached the task of bringing to bear Western thought on the reform of their own society, Jenco (2015) points out that a crucial part of their task was to identify what their own cultural inheritance was, such that it could be brought into relation to a present and future that involved possibly profound transformation. She points out that 'Confucius offered one of the earliest accounts of how an orientation to a particular past could be both deliberate and transformative rather than merely descriptive of an established identity', and that his conception of the Zhou inheritance was but 'one of many possible lineages created when the present was sutured to that particular past' (Jenco 2015: 57). Tan (2004: 82) makes a similar point in claiming that the Confucian 'legacy is successfully transmitted only when the past is revitalized, so that it is embodied in the different experience of the present. Confucius himself may be regarded as the source of this interpretive method, when he says that one who "revitalizes the old to realize the new" is worthy of being a teacher (*Analects* 2.11)'.

These dimensions of harmony I have identified—integration of difference, shared understandings, and accommodation—are meanings that make sense of the texts, and they are meanings that are highly relevant to our own situation. I do not claim these meanings are the only ones or that they alone can make sense of the texts. Another reason for considering them seriously is that the resulting conception of harmony is of enduring relevance—and not just for Chinese civilization. Something like this conception is found in the edicts of the Indian King Asoka in the third century BCE. According to Rajeev Bhargava (2016), Asoka faced a situation of deep disagreements between pasandas—loosely structured groups identified with the teachings of a guru. The differences between these teachings were major and deep. Some, like the Brahmins, held to the ethical centrality of ritual sacrifice and disagreed sharply with the Jains and Buddhists on

this matter. Among those who gave karma (here I use the Sanskrit word that would be used by Brahmins) a central place in their ethics—the concept that our thoughts, words, and actions have causal effects that we ourselves experience sooner or later—there were radical ascetics who evaluated all karma negatively and believed that cessation of all karma—physical and mental motionlessness—was the only way to individual salvation. There were others, such as the Buddhists, who argued that kamma (here I use the Pali word that would be used by Buddhists) could be positive and that salvation most depends on other-related actions of kindness and compassion.

This is just a sample of what Bhargava (2016) calls 'the many-layered, incrementally deep conflicts' involving several different groups who were brought to cooperation through trade and urban living conditions. It illustrates the push and pull of human cooperation: shared understanding is needed to facilitate cooperation, but cooperation thrives when groups can specialize in different activities, and in India these groups are likely to belong to different pasandas with deep differences. The task of Asoka was to develop a way to hold them together, and his edicts about how to lead a good individual and collective life reflect the way he hit upon.

In his 7th edict, Asoka grants leaders of all pasandas permission to travel freely everywhere in the kingdom to provide them an opportunity to teach and convert each other. Bhargava (2016) hypothesizes that the edict addressed severe friction arising from mutual interaction and the attempt to preach one's own ethics to others. Asoka gave assurances to all leaders that they could count on feeling secure everywhere to engage in free interaction and dialogue. The 12th edict calls upon all pasandas to restrain their speech. This call for self-restraint in speech seems freshly relevant in a contemporary society where the power of the spoken or 'tweeted' word to pull us apart, to endorse humiliation and exploitation of women, immigrants, and people of color has made itself felt to shocking effect.

The other side of restraining one's critique of others is restraining one's tendency to self-glorification. This, too, has relevance to the contemporary scene as too many cosmopolitan liberals dismiss what is legitimate in the concerns of those less educated or less affluent by exclusively focusing on what is objectionable in the speech of some of them, treating all of them as puppets of demagogues or people who do not know their own interests. Finally, Asoka advises not only dialogue but an attempt to practicing the precepts of others: not just imagining what it is like to be in these others' shoes, but to try them on and walk around in them. Very shortly, I give an example from US history to illustrate how we might come to exchange shoes with others and walk together along the same path for a while.

This brings me to another metacomment about what I am about to do. I do not claim that the direction in which I develop the Confucian conception of harmony receives its full rationale solely from the early Confucian texts. Rather, I derive that rationale from thinking about the way that accommodation and shared understanding can interact and promote or lead to each other. My way of thinking about the interrelationship of accommodation and shared understanding is shaped not only by the meanings I have derived from the early Confucian texts, but also by their resonance with Ashoka's edicts and by thinking about how these

meanings might apply to our contemporary circumstances of disagreement in pluralistic democracies.

Harmony and Its Relation to Our Present Circumstances

To think about how accommodation and shared understanding might apply to our contemporary circumstances, we must discuss how the dimensions of harmony relate to the value of freedom to speak up in the face of a conflicting majority consensus or views of the powerful—the value of pursuing one's own path toward the good and the meaningful. I want to argue that freedom can support and be supported by shared understanding and accommodation, but it can also be in tension with them as the other two can be at odds with each other. In the end I want to claim that the fusion I am proposing is in principle not radically different from the kinds described earlier in the Chinese philosophical tradition even though it is more clearly a multicultural fusion.

Let me begin by explaining how shared understanding can enter into our deepest disagreements. Understanding how we deeply disagree with others is often a matter of confronting the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. If we hold that some means are morally impermissible even if they are the only available means for promoting the greatest good, we are nevertheless familiar with the kind of consequentialist reasoning that would justify such means, and we may employ such reasoning ourselves, up to a point. If we believe that women should have the right to abortions, we typically do not dismiss considerations regarding the value of a potential or actual person, but do accord them weight even if not the same weight as do those who disagree with us. And, as just discussed, those of us who give great weight to the value of relationship can also care about the protection of individual interests when they come into conflict with the interests of others.

The nature of disagreement is typically like this, that is, it is the foreground against the background of enough agreement so that we understand each other to be differing on the same subject. Recognizing that we share values may not eliminate disagreement because we still may assign different priorities to the values we share, or we may differ on how to interpret our shared values. But where shared values are the background of disagreement, disagreeing parties who seek to accommodate each other may choose to foreground where they agree.

This is how shared understanding can support accommodation: disagreeing parties can cooperate on the basis of shared understanding that coexists with their differences. In the United States, for example, some pro-life and some pro-choice groups have joined together on common projects such as the 'upstream' reduction of unwanted pregnancies. The other way is also possible: *accommodation can support shared understanding*. Disagreeing parties who accommodate each other may become more inclined to learn from each other and to come to unexpected agreements.

After all, we know that we have enough trouble listening to each other when we disagree. We tend to look for reasons to support our current views and ignore reasons that undermine those views (for a review of the plentiful studies on confirmation bias, see Nickerson 1998). We overlook the faults in our own

arguments and magnify the faults in the arguments of others. Simply construing an issue in moral terms is enough to generate increased intolerance for and a punitive attitude toward those with beliefs and practices divergent from one's own, and the effects increase with the intensity of one's moral beliefs (Skitka 2010; Wright et al. 2008). Accommodation can help create a different context for more constructive relationships with disagreeing parties. Within a friendlier social context, belief change can mitigate or soften disagreements rather than turn into intransigent refusal to consider counterevidence.

Consider a phenomenon that Rawls called 'slippage': an indeterminacy and fluidity in people's moral beliefs, even in some of the most basic beliefs (Rawls 2011: 160). The key concepts of our most basic beliefs, such as freedom, equality, and community, are subject to multiple interpretations and to further concrete specification at various levels. People often have concepts of this type that are significantly indeterminate with respect to which interpretations and further specifications they believe to be the right ones. It is not implausible that we could be led to revise or further specify those concepts so that they are not so incompatible with the moral concepts of others we desire to get along with.

A dramatic example of the way that shared understanding and accommodation can mutually support one another is provided by the true story of Ann Atwater and C. P. Ellis (Davidson 2007). In Durham, North Carolina, where I live and teach, Ellis was leader of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1970s. Ann Atwater was one of the most militant black civil rights activists in Durham. Improbably, Atwater and Ellis became friends. The context of this transformation was Durham's attempt to desegregate its public schools in the 1970s. Community organizers created a charrette, a series of community meetings for promoting communication between black and white parents of newly integrating schools. Ellis started to attend these meetings, initially not motivated by good will but more out of a desire to increase the respectability of the Klan, to keep a suspicious eye on the unfolding desegregation process, and to represent the 'white' point of view.

The organizational meeting of the charrette was the opposite of harmonious, with Ellis and Atwater exchanging racial epithets. A community organizer named Bill Riddick saw in Ellis something in addition to the accumulated racial hatreds of the Old South: something guileless and essentially honorable (Davidson 2007: 255). As a result, the organizers of the charrette nominated Ellis as cochair of the charrette's steering committee. And much to Ellis's chagrin, Atwater was named the other cochair. In his retelling of what happened, Ellis was pretty self-aware of why he accepted the cochair position: it was his need to matter, to contribute to a community, and to be recognized for his contributions. He identified that desire as his motivation to call Atwater, to acknowledge that the two of them had huge differences, and to suggest that they had the responsibility for making the charrette work (Terkel 2005: 198). Ellis and Atwater had a dinner meeting to see how they could do this. After years of viewing Atwater as a symbol of everything he hated about African Americans, Ellis was overwhelmed by the revelation that 'she was capable of sitting in a chair in a restaurant and eating food' (Davidson 2007: 263). He was confronted with something that is often the basis of further

shared understanding: the ordinary, shared humanness of someone previously perceived as an enemy. As their partnership on school desegregation developed, Atwater, half humorously, affirmed her role of protecting Ellis when he went to school meetings in black neighborhoods. In fact, she did stop some students from tearing down an exhibit of Klan literature that Ellis had set up at a school fair (Davidson 2007: 267).

What began as a *modus vivendi* began to take shape as accommodation. Factors besides Ellis's desire for community included the fact that other African American activists extended gestures of accommodation to Ellis during that first organizational meeting. Howard Clement got up and said he was glad Ellis came to the meeting because Ellis was 'the most honest man' there. He even said that he and Ellis were 'brothers' because they had common concerns about their children (this gesture by Clements caused some consternation in the African American community, including his own father[4]). Even after the exchange of racial epithets, several African Americans went up to Ellis after the meeting adjourned and offered to shake his hand. Ellis was shocked and unable to reciprocate, but that experience came to be juxtaposed in his mind with another one in which a white city councilman crossed the street to avoid having to greet him in public, even though they had been having telephone conversations and had been meeting privately about the African American 'problem' (Terkel 2005: 198). This brought home to Ellis that he was good enough to be used by the 'respectable' white establishment but not to be seen in public with.

Accommodation developed into shared understanding. At a meeting of the charrette, Ellis was struck by a black parent's protests that teachers and school administrators treated her children as if they were stupid troublemakers. He had been about to say the same thing about his own children, that they had been treated as 'poor white trash'. This experience happened repeatedly throughout the day, and Ellis was stunned to hear, over and over, his own concerns coming from their mouths: 'When arguments among kids erupted at school, it was the working-class children—black and white—who were always blamed and punished' (Davidson 2007: 274).

This led Atwater and Ellis to talking about how hard it was to raise children without much money, about how they were always having to tell their kids that they were just as good as kids from middle-class homes, and never to be ashamed of who they were. At the same time Atwater and Ellis confessed to each other that they had to hide their own shame about not being better providers. They talked about the teachers never letting their kids forget that they came from impoverished households (Davidson 2007: 268). Black and white parents at the charrette turned to making recommendations to the school board as to how their children could be treated more fairly. Because Ellis and Atwater were cooperating with each other, they both faced criticism and shunning from some members of their respective communities, and on the last night of the charrette, Ellis publicly renounced the Klan and tore up his membership card.

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[4] Clements recounts this incident and his father's reaction in the documentary film *An Unlikely Friendship* (Bloom 2002), at 30:50–33:06.

Let me go back to Bhargava's interpretation of the path to Asokan harmony and relate that to the Ellis-Atwater story. These two people not only understood better what it was like to be in each other's shoes, but they walked in each other's shoes: Atwater defended Ellis's attempt to display Klan literature. Ellis in the end tore up his Klan membership card. Doing that helped them to walk the same path together in friendship and common purpose—that of care and advocacy for their children. Of course, I am not saying we will frequently encounter such a dramatic interchange between accommodation and shared understanding. But this example certainly is an inspiration for less daunting interchanges we *can* accomplish much more frequently.

Let me now make a case for a positive relationship between harmony and freedom. When harmony is conceived at least partly as the valuing of difference, freedom for the individual can play a crucial role. The relevant kind of freedom includes freedom of expression and freedom to explore and develop one's interests, strengths, and skills. To get mutual exchange and greater understanding between those who disagree, we do need, as Asoka perceived, to relax pressures to conform to whatever prevailing consensus there is. The value of freedom can pull us in the direction of relaxing restrictions on speech and even encouraging speech from those who tend to be silent or are being silenced by others.

The positive relationship, however, is not simple. At the same time, constraint of freedom can be justified to promote or to protect harmony as shared agreement on the value of relationships of mutual concern and trust. Speech might have to be restricted in cases where it seriously threatens basic forms of shared understanding that form part of the framework of mutual trust. Like everyone one of our treasured values, freedom can also pull us in contrary directions—in this case, the direction of restricting the speech of those who would do the silencing through intimidation and creating a culture of hatred for those they wish to silence. Sometimes historical events tilt the weight of judgment in favor of restriction—see, for example, the illegality of Holocaust denial in many European countries—and sometimes acts of intimidation are so egregious that they clearly merit the punishment of law, as in the case of the students at the University of Mississippi who hung a noose and draped the Confederate battle flag around the statue of James Meredith, the university's first black student (Srvluga 2015). The danger is that those who would restrict speech to defend against intimidators risk becoming intimidators themselves.

The current debate on US college campuses regarding institutional policing against 'microaggressions' highlights both kinds of consideration rooted in freedom. The fact is that women and people of color have long been intimidated and silenced by remarks that are often not intended to have these effects but that are embedded in the culture and absorbed by everyone. But when the cuts and slights are relatively subtle and open to reasonable interpretive debate, those who wish to defend the vulnerable can become intimidators, and social media, apart from any institutional punishment, can have life-changing consequences for perceived offenders. Such considerations weigh in favor of restricting or punishing speech only in egregious cases or for chronic offenders, but it is in the Confucian spirit of harmony to look for more positive ways of addressing the problem of

welcoming those who represent difference and challenge to orthodoxy and of countering those who would exclude. There is, of course, the answer that rightful speech answers wrongful speech, but we would do well to try to promote a more hospitable culture of *listening* to right speech.

Confucian *li* 禮 can play key role in addressing the challenge of encouraging the inclusion of difference in harmony—certainly not the total answer, but part of it, the part that recognizes how our responses to others are shaped by deep-rooted cultural habits. In *Analects* 2.3, Confucius stated that injunctions and law can only go so far in promoting social order. People must be guided by a sense of what is shameful, a sense that preserves mutually respectful interactions in the face of disagreement. The Chinese word *li* 禮 is usually translated as ritual propriety, and indeed it does cover observing ritual in our familiar contemporary sense: ceremonies that mark major life passages, such as death, coming of age, marriage, and death. But *li* also constitutes a kind of 'social grammar', norms and practices that specify mutually respectful behavior in everyday social interactions and discourse. *Li* in the Confucian sense includes ceremonies and social grammar, such as the way one begins and ends an archery competition by bowing and making way for one's competitors, and the custom of serving the losers so-called 'penalty drinks'. The mindful performance of such *li* is a way for people to enact and strengthen dispositions toward affective attitudes of care and respect. When rituals are woven into our daily life and our institutions, they provide opportunities to affirm, enact, and strengthen dispositions to use one's freedom to speak responsibly and with due concern for the ones one might be criticizing, to enact Asokan self-restraint with regard to criticizing others and glorifying oneself.

There is a worry that racially and ethnically diverse societies cannot accommodate difference. Robert Putnam's 2007 study found that diverse communities will tend to be lower in the social goods comprising 'social capital' such as reciprocity and trust. However, Putnam cites not simply diversity but contention over limited resources as a primary factor in divisiveness (2007: 142). He also observes, and this is very much congenial to a Confucian perspective, that a century ago shared identities were promoted within 'community centers, athletic fields, and schools', that they 'were among the most efficacious instruments for incorporating new immigrants' and that 'we need to reinvest in such places and activities once again, enabling us all to become comfortable with diversity' (2007: 164). We need to repurpose crucial institutions where people of diverse backgrounds meet and can join in common purpose, as the story of Ellis and Atwater and the desegregation of Durham public schools illustrates. Schools distribute learning, skills, goods, and opportunities to children that greatly matter to their families. Institutions where people have a large stake are far more likely to attract participation and affective investment. Rituals and social grammar deployed at such sites of interaction between diverse groups can make for friendly contact. Teachers are critical in introducing and sustaining a social grammar for the classroom and interactions between students and their families of diverse backgrounds. Preliminary and recently published findings of a study in the United States by social scientists (Jones-Correa et al. 2015; Tropp et al. 2018) point to the quality and friendliness of the interactions between groups in Philadelphia and Atlanta as conducive to trust and civic

engagement in workplaces, neighborhoods, and public spaces. Among two immigrant groups, Mexicans and South Asians, and two native-born groups of whites and blacks, trust increased with greater face-to-face contact, and there were secondary transfer effects in the sense that friendly contact with one group increased trust in other groups.

In summary, ritual and social grammar can aid us in reconciling harmony and freedom by helping us to avoid frequent resort to punishment and suppression of those who seek to exclude difference. Without a sense of relationship to diverse others and a shared fate with them we risk persecution of those identified as threats by virtue of religion, ethnicity, or nation of origin.

I conclude with the point that rituals and other forms of social grammar may be used as vehicles of respectful protest against injustice. In the American South, the public violation of segregation law and willingness of protesters to be arrested was an act of appeal to the consciences of the white majority and to their Mencian sense of shame. Key figures in the American civil rights movement, including John Haynes Holmes beginning in the 1920s, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr. were deeply influenced by Gandhi, including his leadership of a march to protest the British tax on salt. That protest was an inspiration for marches for civil rights and sit-ins at 'whites only' eating establishments and in the whites-only section of buses to protest segregation (King, Jr. 2000: 478). Consider the kneeling of African American football players during the playing of the American national anthem to protest the killing of African Americans by police. Such an act would not have the ritual meaning it has were it not that the standard form is to stand facing the flag when the anthem is played. Of course, the meaning of that ritual protest is now contested, with some choosing to portray it as disrespectful to members of the military. But as Luke Bretherton (2017) has pointed out, kneeling has symbolically carried the meaning of veneration and respect for something beyond the individual. One of the first players to kneel, Eric Reid (2017), has explained that he and teammate Colin Kapernick expressly chose kneeling as their gesture precisely because it does connote respect. We should expect political contest to carry over into construal of the meaning of rituals of protest, and we should be prepared to correct mistaken interpretations or intentional distortions.

You might now better appreciate why I wanted to warn you that the direction in which I wanted to develop the Confucian concept of harmony is not based solely on the early texts. This might be thought to be particularly the case with my extension of Confucian rituals to express moral protest and to appeal to the moral consciences of others.

But there are protests that make use of ritual and social grammar in the Confucian tradition. I quote a final passage from *Analects* 17.20 to the end. It tells us how Confucius conveys his disapproval for a man of influence who sought to have a meeting with him.

> Ru Bei sought a meeting with Confucius, but Confucius declined to entertain him, feigning illness. Just as the envoy carrying the message was about to depart, Confucius got out his lute and sang, making sure that the messenger heard him. (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 208)

This is my recipe for 'Harmonious Soup' with a bit of spice at the end. I hope the reader has found it tasty, but in any case, the recipe accommodates disagreement.

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