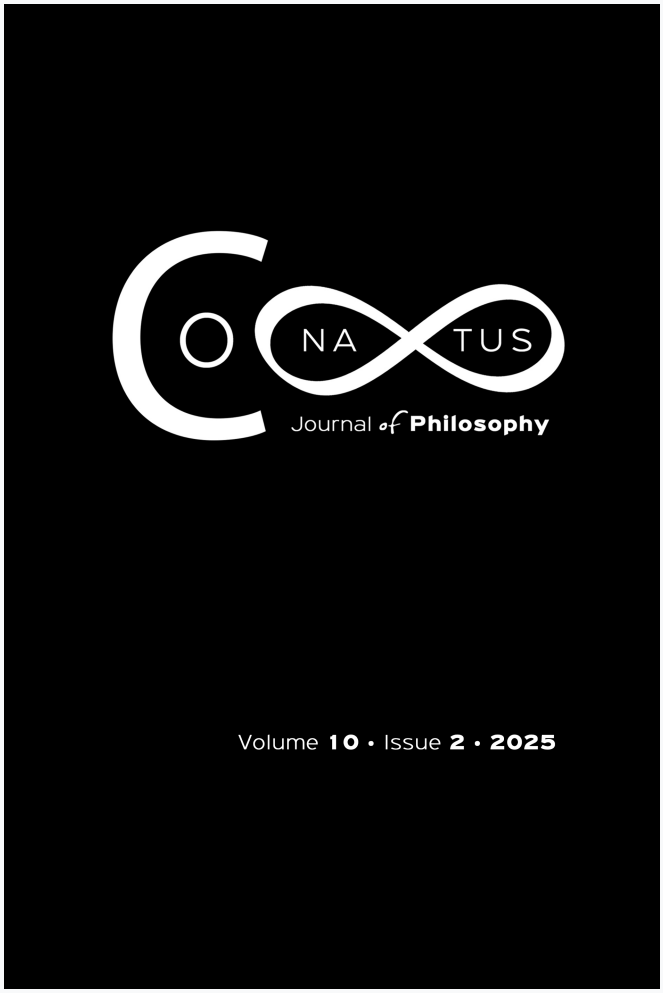
Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 10, No 2 (2025)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



Harmony as an Ideal: A Proposal for the Further Development of Heraclitus' Approach

Nestor Courakis

doi: 10.12681/cjp.42262

To cite this article:

Courakis, N. (2025). Harmony as an Ideal: A Proposal for the Further Development of Heraclitus' Approach. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, *10*(2), 73–104. https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.42262

N. Courakis · *Conatus* 10, no. 2 (2025): 73-104
doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.42262

Harmony as an Ideal: A Proposal for the Further Development of Heraclitus' Approach

Nestor Courakis
University of Nicosia, Cyprus
E-mail address: nestorcourakis.gr@gmail.com
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0597-9241

Abstract

In the study that follows, one might find several elements that, building on the concept of Heraclitean Harmony, move it a step further. This is especially notable considering that Heraclitus himself did not seem inclined to assign a more specialized meaning to the notion of Harmony. In particular, as Karl Jaspers observes, Heraclitus does not explicitly explain – at least in the surviving fragments – either the precise way in which opposites are connected (or united) with each other, or in what exact sense one might speak of a unity of opposites. Nor does he attempt to construct a "logic of oppositions" (a dialectic); rather, he simply starts from the grand vision of that which exists everywhere as the One and the Same. Besides, Heraclitus never even raised the question of how a synthesis – as opposed to a mere unity – of opposing forces might be achieved, for example, by envisioning "noble competition/fair play" as a harmonization of war and peace. Instead, these reflections possess in this study a primarily autonomous philosophical character, which – taking Heraclitean thought as their starting point – explore Harmony as an ideal for contemporary humanity. This ideal, according to the author, is based on the idea that each opposite contains elements useful to the mind (advantages) as well as harmful to it (disadvantages). The advantages of the one opposite are the disadvantages of the other. Hence, if one desires to attain the maximum advantages of a situation and/or the possible minimum disadvantages, one has to combine the opposites, to balance them properly and thus achieve harmony. Externally, this balance finds its expression in the form of ideals, such as justice, which is the balance between tolerance and severity.

Keywords: *Heraclitus; harmony; unity of the opposites; classical thought; pre-Socratics; normative ideal*

Received: 25 July 2025 | **Revised**: 21 September 2025 | **Accepted:** 10 October 2025

I. Prelude

The study that follows was first published in 1971 in Greek under the title "Opposites and Harmony" in a special issue of the Hellenic Humanistic Society, whose president at the time was the inspired philologist Constantine Vourveris (1899-1978), Professor of Ancient Greek Philology at the University of Athens and a foundational figure in the development of humanistic studies in Greece. Naturally, the style of the text – despite the careful scholarly documentation – also revealed a youthful enthusiasm and a passionate drive to open new philosophical horizons (the author was only 24 years old at the time).

However, upon rereading this text today – now refreshed with an updated articulation of its key positions – one might find in it several elements that, building on the concept of Heraclitean Harmony, move it a step further. This is especially notable considering that Heraclitus himself did not seem inclined to assign a more specialized meaning to the notion of Harmony.

In particular, as Karl Jaspers astutely observes in his work *The Great Philosophers*,[1] Heraclitus does not explicitly explain – at least in the surviving fragments – either the precise way in which opposites are connected (or united) with each other, or in what exact sense one might speak of a unity of opposites. Nor does he attempt to construct a "logic of oppositions" (a dialectic); rather, he simply starts from the grand vision of that which exists everywhere as the One and the Same.

Therefore, the developments that follow do not seek to offer an interpretative supplement to Heraclitus' notion of Harmony. Moreover, Heraclitus never even raised the question of how a synthesis – as opposed to a mere unity – of opposing forces might be achieved, for example, by envisioning "noble competition/fair play" as a harmonization of war and peace – see below. Instead, these reflections possess a primarily autonomous philosophical character, which – taking Heraclitean thought as their starting point – explore Harmony as an ideal for contemporary humanity.

II. From opposites to harmony

The starting point of this study is, of course, Heraclitus's fundamental observation that, at its core, *all phenomena are subject to constant*

[1] I used the French translation: Karl Jaspers, *Les grands philosophes*, Vol. 4 (Plon, 1972), 32.

change.[2] As Pindar equally notes: "But within a short time, things change, and now other winds blow."[3] Indeed, whether a flower becomes fruit within a few days or a planet slightly alters its orbit over thousands of years, essentially, we are dealing with a continual transformation of phenomena and of the sensible world.

These changing conditions appear in two forms: either as the *evolutionary development* of an initial state,[4] or as a *transition from one state to its complete opposite*.[5] Usually, the evolutionary course comes first; when it reaches a peak (e.g., absolute freedom within a lawless society), it is followed by its exact opposite (e.g., absolute discipline through authoritarian governance), and so on.

This idea was first articulated by Plato: "Excessive freedom seems to change into nothing but excessive slavery, both for the individual and for the city."[6] The shift from one state to another is more abrupt when the initial condition is maintained by force. As Guicciardini writes in his *History of Italy*,

> It is in human nature that, when people escape from an extreme condition which they have been forced to endure, they readily rush to the opposite extreme, without pausing at any middle point.[7]

But precisely this easy passage from one extreme to another also reveals the striking similarity between the two extremes,[8] and, in this specific case, between anarchy and tyranny or authoritarianism.

Consequently, the form of the evolutionary course followed by various conditions is, ultimately, a manifestation of a *broader process in which opposites succeed one another*. This does not, of course, exclude minor shifts or adjustments in one direction or the other, but

---

[2] Hermann Diels und Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente den Vorsokratiker* (Weidmannsche Hildesheim, 2004), fragment B 91 – [henceforth: author, number of fragment].

[3] Pindar, *Olympian Odes*, VIII, 94-95. In Diane Arnson Svarlien (ed.), *The Odes of Pindar*, Perseus Project 1.0 (Yale University Press, 1991).

[4] Heraclitus, B 31.

[5] Heraclitus, B 126.

[6] Plato, *Republic*, 564a 3-4. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 5, trans. Paul Shorey (Harvard University Press, 1969).

[7] Craufurd Tait Ramage, *Familiar Quotations from French and Italian Authors* (Routledge, 1886), 463.

[8] Cf. corresponding approaches in Heraclitus, B 126, and Plato's *Symposium*, trans. R. G. Bury (Heffer and Sons, 1909), 207d ff. Cf. Heraclitus, B 103, and Democritus, 233.

such changes carry little specific weight in the overall progression of events.

It should also be noted that these *opposites* are *interdependent* – for example, life cannot be conceived without death – *and mutually influential*, in the sense that internal oppositions, being in a constant state of flux and conflict with one another, coexist and shape each other over time.

A similar approach is found in Aristotle's *theory of the mean*, according to which two opposing conditions differ in the degree of intensity of a fundamental quality they share as a common basis. Typically, one possesses it in excess and the other in deficiency – for instance, the reckless person exhibits in excess the very trait that the coward lacks, and which lies at the midpoint: in this case, the virtue of courage.[9]

a. Specific aspects of opposites that are beneficial for human beings

Every opposition contains elements that are spiritually beneficial, as they compel the human being to live in accordance with what is highest within them, thereby elevating and uplifting them into the realm of values, such as freedom and truth. However, each such opposition simultaneously contains harmful aspects that hinder or obstruct this spiritual ascent.

For *example*, *war*, motivated by the innate drive for self defense and maintenance of self in existence,[10] invigorates the spirit of struggle and compels the human being to surpass themselves in order to achieve victory and excellence. At the same time, however, war entails bloodshed, destruction, and a degradation of human dignity, thereby disrupting the normal order of human life and producing widespread suffering. Conversely, the opposing force to *war, peace*, while it ensures the conditions for human beings to cultivate their personality and to produce cultural achievements in science, literature, and the arts – within a framework of respect for human rights – can also lead to a life of softness and indulgence, and thus to the stagnation of spiritual virtues.

---

[9] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, trans. H. Rackham (Harvard University Press, 1934), 1106b 36ff., and especially 1107a 2ff., as well as 1107b 1ff.; also, Plato, *Statesman*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1921), 308c.

[10] See in particular, Purissima Emelda Egbekpalu et al., "Dialectics of War as a Natural Phenomenon: Existential Perspective," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 129-145. Cf. also Paul Ertl, "Progressus as an Explanatory Model: An Anthropological Principle Illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine War," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 188.

Similarly, in the aforementioned contrast between *freedom and order*, order – existing for the sake of the collective – prevents the disintegration caused by internal conflict, but at the same time limits the individual. Freedom, on the other hand – existing for the sake of the individual – does indeed offer the necessary space for personal development, but when it becomes excessive, it threatens the cohesion of the group. As Adamantios Korais states in his *Political Counsels to the Greeks*:

> When citizens do not know the precise limits of their freedom, they either become slaves, ready to bow their necks to the yoke of the first tyrant who comes along, or they rebel against the lawful government, turning it into outright anarchy.[11]

For this reason, according to the apt definition given by Marcus Aurelius, freedom must consist in this: "To be neither a tyrant over anyone, nor a slave to anyone."[12]

b. The problem with one-sided approaches

A single opposing force cannot offer all the potential advantages one might expect from it (except, of course, for the opposition crystallized in the fundamental pair spirit-matter, which, however, has a transcendent value and does not appear in a pure form within the sensible world). The reason a single opposition cannot provide completeness of benefits is that it represents only one side of life's continuous movement between opposites. Thus, it inevitably displays corresponding deficiencies. Hence, a one-sided choice of just one opposition as a means of solving a given problem, under normal circumstances, tends as a rule to lead to misjudgments or failures.

It is useful to observe, on a broader level, that one-sidedness stands in contradiction to the very worldview of *ancient Greek civilization*, which cultivated – or rather embraced – all possible philosophical and social tendencies, without preemptively excluding any of them. Thus, we see the development of theories by both the rationalist Plato and the empiricist Democritus, while in Aristotle these two currents are synthesized. Later on, Plato's trajectory was revived by the Stoics, and that of Democritus by Epicurus. As Maria P. Pattichi aptly ob-

[11] Adamantios Korais, "Prolegomena," in *Aristotle's Politics* (Elliniki Vivliothiki, 1821) [in Greek].

[12] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Heys (Modern Library, 2013), IV.31.

serves – making the aforementioned remarks: "This salvific dualism was Greece's legacy to the modern world, and ever since, one-sidedness, which dulls the intellect, has become more difficult to maintain."[13]

We might even add here that it is perhaps no coincidence that the two most luminous resurgences of the human spirit – *ancient Greek civilization and the Renaissance* – were *primarily grounded in Harmony and the idea of Measure*.[14]

On the other hand, it is well known that *one-sided choices* are often reinforced by extreme psychological states, such as *prejudice, fanaticism, and ideological fixations*, which are typically attached to corresponding ideopolitical "-isms." In such states, one-sidedness can be said to lead even to a distortion of human nature itself – the only entity within the realm of living beings that possesses the ability, through repeated experiences, to grasp the universal, that is, to form general concepts of broad applicability. Through this process, human nature acquires a comprehensive overview of reality, allowing it to reach knowledge, science, and the causal structure of things.[15]

Thus arises the *necessity of thoroughly examining both opposing aspects of any given situation*, in order to fully investigate the components of the problem and to properly utilize the advantages on each side. It is self-evident that the need to hear differing viewpoints in the pursuit of truth becomes even more urgent whenever vital human interests depend on the discovery of that truth. Consequently, dialogue is established, among other things, as a mandatory requirement in politics (provided the regime is democratic), as well as in the conduct of legal proceedings.

Regarding *political dialogue*, the Greek statesman Charilaos Trikoupis stated characteristically in a speech delivered in Parliament on December 14, 1883 – while also explaining his preference for a two-party system modeled after that of Great Britain:

> We desire an opposition program and a strong opposition, because having our own program, we recognize that every issue has two sides, and that both sides require expression and can be used for the country's benefit when examined with good faith.[16]

---

[13] Maria Pattichi, *Measure of Balance: The Legacy of Greek Civilization to the Western World* (Nicosia, 1972), 51 [in Greek].

[14] Cecil Maurice Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (Mentor Books, 1957), 100ff. and 209ff.; Humphrey D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Penguin Books, 1951), 186ff.

[15] See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. E. S. Bouchier (B. H. Blackwell, 1901), I, 31, 87b 30.

[16] Charilaos Trikoupis, *Analekta*, Vol. III (Sakellariou, 1912), 241 [in Greek].

As for the conduct of *trials, dialogue* is safeguarded by the principles of equality of arms and mutual hearing. In this context, the Latin procedural maxim *audiatur et altera pars* ("let the other side be heard as well") applies, as does the ancient Greek injunction from Phocylides: Μηδενί δίκην δικάσῃς πρίν ἀμφοῖν μῦθον ἀκούσῃς (do not judge anyone before you have heard the speech of both sides). These principles provide fertile ground for speech and counter-speech, thereby creating the dialectical phases of legal proceedings, which in turn lead to the possibility of true knowledge.[17]

According to a theory that is increasingly gaining ground and bears the telling name *Theory of Balancing of Interests* (Interessenabwägung),[18] even the interpretation of legal norms, in order to reach correct decisions, must be conducted through a comparative balancing of the conflicting interests involved – both individual and societal – while giving precedence to the interest that carries the greatest importance for society. See, for instance, Supreme Civil Court of Greece decision no. 841/2017 (of civil character, digitally accessible via Qualex), which relates to the unforeseen change of circumstances:

> Within the framework of such balancing, it is of course important to establish limits – limits shaped by the constitutional principle of proportionality as well as by the *ideals of Measure and Harmony* – when exercising conflicting interests, in order to ensure their harmonious coexistence and to prevent any overstepping of these boundaries.[19]

This observation also recalls the significant remark of Heraclitus, who stated that even the sun, should it deviate from its prescribed path and proper measure, will be pursued by Dike (Justice) and the Erinyes (Furies).[20]

Indeed, *Harmony, as the meeting point of opposing forces*, simultaneously *defines the boundaries* within which each opposing force may legitimately operate without harming the other or the collective whole of society.

A characteristic example is the concept of freedom, which – as I have had the opportunity to argue in a previous study,

---

[17] See Jürgen Meyer, *Dialektik im Strafprozeß* (C. B. Mohr, 1965).

[18] See also the seminal work by the originator of this theory: Philipp Heck, *Begriffsbildung und Interessenjurisprudenz* (C. B. Mohr, 1932).

[19] Article 388 of the *Greek Civil Code*.

[20] Heraclitus, B 94.

> [...] has a clearly delineated content, with its outer limits defined by the rights of others, the interests of the community as a whole, and the requirements for the maintenance and advancement of a democratic society; any transgression of these boundaries, and the transformation of freedom into indulgence, ultimately undermines the very notion of freedom itself.[21]

In this light, numerous institutions of modern legal and social life – such as the principle of *abuse of rights*,[22] namely, the excessive or improper exercise of a right – can find their legal foundation and operational framework within the broader conceptual context of Harmony.

c. The role of harmony in the synthesis of opposites

Every opposition, taken in isolation – as previously noted – cannot provide the *maximum* potential spiritual benefit, i.e., the kind of benefit which, according to Plato's eloquent expression in the *Timaeus* (90d), is linked with the understanding of the universe as a whole and the full comprehension of the harmonies and revolutions in the Cosmos, beyond the material world.

The *maximization of this benefit for each of the two opposing elements*, and the corresponding containment of their non-spiritual (or detrimental) effects, can only be realized *through the proper connection, synthesis, and equilibrium* of both opposing forces – that is, through Harmony.

It is thus up to the decision-maker tasked with resolving a given issue to selectively adopt and utilize the positive aspects of both opposing forces while neutralizing their respective shortcomings.

But *how can this connection and synthesis of opposites be achieved?* This study argues that the decisive role lies in the capacity of the individual *to first identify and select* the positive (and only the positive) spiritual benefits of each opposing element, and then to interconnect and synthesize those benefits into a new integrated whole. To grasp this process intuitively, *poetic or allegorical approaches* can initially be of help. For example, the poet Yiannis Gryparis, in his poem *Satire*, illustrates a proper selection process of the best elements through the metaphor of bees, writing characteristically:

---

[21] Nestor Courakis, "Security and Freedom: Their Static and Dynamic Boundaries," *Nomiko Vima* 54 (2006): 1221 [in Greek].

[22] Article 281 of the Greek Civil Code, and Article 25, §3 of the Greek Constitution.

From the blossoms of things
they draw threefold
the purest essence.[23]

Similarly, Saint Basil the Great, in his excellent exhortation *To the Young on How They Might Profit from Pagan Literature*, uses the same image of bees who "take from flowers only what they need for their work and leave the rest behind and fly away."[24] In doing so, he encourages the young to adopt a similar selective attitude, echoing the advice of the Apostle Paul: "Test all things; hold fast to what is good."[25]

However, the requirement of *selectivity* in the search for or formation of an optimal condition also implies something further regarding the balancing of opposites: Namely, that *harmony is not necessarily found at the midpoint between two extremes* – not at the geometric or quantitative center equidistant from both ends of a spectrum. Such a mechanistic fusion of opposites would never succeed in producing qualitative harmonization or in maximizing the advantages of each.

On the contrary, such a "compromising" or "middling" practice – which bears no resemblance to the higher, qualitative notion of *Aristotelian moderation* – ends up neutralizing the strengths of one side with those of the other, resulting in no final benefit. The outcome is merely a suspended state, neither resolved nor improved.

d. Examples of harmonious synthesis of opposites

The distinction between "compromised" or intermediate states and *true states of Harmony* becomes much clearer when concrete examples are provided – illustrating precisely *how* such connection and harmonization of opposites may be achieved in specific contexts.

In the example of the *opposing forces of war and peace*, the "intermediate" condition is represented by the ambiguous state known as "neither war nor peace," in which, although formal military operations are not entirely excluded, skirmishes and border incidents primarily occur. A characteristic example is the latent conflict between Arabs and Israelis following the establishment of the Israeli State in 1948, culminating in the three wars of 1947-1949, 1967, and 1973.

---

[23] Yiannis Gryparis, *Scarab Beetles and Terracottas* (I. N. Sideris, 1943) [in Greek].

[24] Saint Basil the Great, *To the Young on How They Might Profit from Pagan Literature*, ed. V. Bilalis (Grigoris, 1989), IV: 18-30 [in Greek].

[25] Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

By contrast, the *ideal state*, that is, the state of *Harmony*, is realized in the *balancing condition of noble competition* (ἅμιλλα). Whether in the form of a sports match, a literary contest, or the scientific pursuit of a prize, competition offers a framework for the harmonious fusion of war and peace – that is, a contest that incorporates elements of conflict, derived from war, and elements of conflict resolution, derived from peace, all within the bounds of Ethics (fair play, *noble competion*, εὖ ἀγωνίζεσθαι). Therefore, competition is distinguished from other forms of confrontation, first by its motivating aims and second by its methods employed.

Schematically, this *harmonious condition* of noble competition, like other forms of synthesis of opposites through *Harmony*, may be *represented at the apex of a triangle*, with the *two extremes – war and peace – occupying the base corners,* and the *intermediate state of ambiguous "neither war nor peace"* placed *midway along the base*.

A similar structure of Harmony appears in other contexts as well: For instance, in the realm of a *nation's foreign policy*, the opposing tendencies are represented, on the one hand, by alignment with one of the so-called Great Powers, and, on the other, by a "middle-ground" policy that avoids forming alliances or taking stances on critical international issues, aiming instead to maintain equal distance and neutrality.

The *harmonious approach*, as proposed by the Greek statesman Eleftherios Venizelos, consists in shaping a foreign policy that seeks, as far as possible, to serve the country's specific interests, by *finding allies and partners within the sphere where those interests are most likely to be realized*.[26]

Nonetheless, even *neutrality* itself can evolve into an *optimal tool of foreign policy*, especially when practiced by a state with strong geopolitical standing, seizing the moment's opportunities. This was, for instance, the case with *Turkey's foreign policy* during World War II, which led to its characterization by Weber as "the evasive neutral."[27]

Moreover, in the previously mentioned opposition between *freedom* and *order*, the intermediate or rather "middle-ground" condition consists, at least from an *Aristotelian* perspective, in the *equal* strengthening of those social strata that represent the forces of *freedom* (e.g., radical poor), of *order* (conservative affluent classes), and of the *inter-*

[26] For an equally pragmatic approach, albeit in a totally different cultural setting, see Panagiotis Kallinikos, "Political Realism in the Chinese Warring States Period and the European Renaissance: Han Fei and Machiavelli," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 127-166.

[27] Frank G. Weber, *The Evasive Neutral: Germany, Britain, and the Quest for a Turkish Alliance in the Second World War* (University of Missouri Press, 1983).

mediate condition (e.g., progressive bourgeoisie). However, such an approach may intensify competing demands and lead to uprisings and revolts – thus, ultimately, to conditions of *unfreedom*, i.e., a state of *masters and slaves*.[28]

By contrast, according to Aristotle, *Harmony* is achieved through the well-ordered condition, wherein such strengthening of individual citizens takes place *justly* and *primarily through the empowerment of the middle class*. This class, according to Aristotle, "ποιεῖ ροπήν καί κωλύει γίνεσθαι τάς ἐναντίας ὑπερβολάς,"[29] in other words, it contributes to *balance* and impedes the *excesses* of other opposing social strata. Yet, this *empowerment of the middle class* in relation to other social groups must not occur through the *equalization of wealth*, but through the *equalization of desires*. According to Aristotle, this can be achieved only if *the laws enforce the necessary education*.[30]

In the *modern era*, however, *social contradictions* have clearly become *less sharp* than in Aristotle's time, such that *social stratification* is no longer as distinct as it once was. On the contrary, antagonistic social roles now frequently *overlap*, in the sense that a citizen may hold a high status in the social hierarchy but still be subject, in employment terms, to orders from superiors. This softening of *social antagonisms* is also connected with the fact that, in contemporary *pluralistic* societies, there exists – at any rate – a certain *consensus* on fundamental values (especially those protected by the *Constitution*), as a necessary outcome of *mutual concessions and balances between various social groups, in pursuit of social peace*. Consequently, the *class-based* and *toxic* spirit of confrontation and hostility that prevailed until the formation – around the dawn of the 20th century – of the modern *Rule of Law* and *Welfare State* in various developed countries seems to have significantly diminished.[31]

In light of these new developments, the pursuit of a *harmonious relationship* between *freedom* and *order* could thus be located in the *concept of Social Justice*. Through this, the State seeks to distribute or redistribute the fruits of economic development in a manner that is both *fair* and *compassionate*.[32]

---

[28] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1295b 1ff.

[29] Ibid., 1295b 41-42.

[30] Ibid., 1266b 29ff.

[31] R. Dahrendorf, *Classes et conflits de classes dans la société industrielle* (Mouton, 1972).

[32] See this definition of Social Justice in the United Nations Security Council, *Expert Report* (United Nations, 2006), http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/Social Justice.pdf; see also Nestor Courakis, "In Search for a New Eutopia in Criminal Policy: The Role of Social

Accordingly, the term *Social Justice* assumes a broader meaning than in Aristotelian thought, where the focus was on the *middle class*, as it now ultimately encompasses *all* social groups, and not merely select segments.

As mentioned above, the two main components of social justice are: *fairness*, which promotes *meritocracy*, and *compassion*, which promotes *social solidarity*. As a result, *fairness* – that is, the value-based (re)distribution of goods – emerges as equally necessary and imperative as the humanitarian ideal of *social solidarity*. In other words, a society must not only care for the protection of its *vulnerable groups* and the support of members in need, through measures such as improved public health, public education, social security, and social welfare. Rather, its core mission must also be to ensure *meritocratic equality of opportunity* in education and employment and to actively support those members who are capable in a given domain and aspire to build a successful professional career. Such measures may include the establishment of more *schools of excellence*, the broader *granting of scholarships* to talented young people, and the *provision of start-up capital* for their first professional steps.

Furthermore, *measures aimed at enhancing meritocracy* also include initiatives for the improved functioning of the public administration – especially efforts to reduce *non-merit-based hiring and promoting* in the civil service and to combat *corruption* and *evaluated appointments* in the field of higher education.

Already in antiquity, leading philosophers such as Plato in his *Republic*[33] and Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*[34] analyzed with great clarity how *justice, moderation, and harmony* ("δίκαιον ἀνάλογόν τι," i.e. *a proportional form of justice*) may be established on the basis of *rectifying injustice* and *recognizing everyone's merit*. In the 20th century, this debate reached a new peak in the realm of political philosophy, as the long-standing *dilemma* resurfaced: whether *meritocratic fairness* or *social solidarity* should take precedence – sparked by opposing arguments among thinkers such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Thomas Piketty, Michael Sandel, among others.

However, it becomes clear from the above, I believe, that *social justice* must, without resorting to *false dilemmas*, rest equally on both of its foundational pillars: *meritocratic fairness* and *social solidarity*,

---

Justice," in *Ceremonial Presentation of the Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Nestor Courakis*, 40-57 (Max-Planck Gesellschaft, 2017).

[33] Plato, *Republic*, 433c ff.

[34] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1131b 38ff., and 1131a 33ff.

aiming to achieve their *harmonious coexistence*. In contrast, a "middle-ground" condition would consist of the *equal distribution or redistribution* of goods to all, regardless of *individual merit* or *need* – as was the case in certain totalitarian regimes of the so-called "actually existing or real socialism."

In this *harmonious* form, *social justice* constitutes not merely a fundamental ideal, but perhaps the *supreme value* of a well-governed society, as it responds to the aspirations of *all* social groups. What is required, however, is *constant vigilance* on the part of political leadership, so that the *balance* between the two key components of *social justice – meritocratic fairness* and *social solidarity* – may be *continuously adjusted, without dogmatism*, to suit the particular needs and historical circumstances of each society.

Furthermore, at the individual level – specifically concerning one's *conduct toward others* – if we take *strictness* and *tolerance* as opposing extremes, then a "middle-of-the-road" (or *ambiguous*) stance would consist of an arbitrary behavioral pattern: one that is at times strict, at other times lenient – motivated solely by the momentary *moods or perceptions* of the person involved, without due regard for the *particular circumstances* of each case.

By contrast, a *harmonious* mode of conduct arises when behavior is grounded in *justice* – that is, when each individual is given what is appropriate to them, based both on their *needs* and their *merit*. This mirrors what has been said earlier in relation to *social justice* on a societal level.

More broadly, *justice* – which also forms the basis of *Aristotle's doctrine of the mean* – safeguards for each person what they deserve. In this respect, it serves, as in Plato's philosophical vision, as a *reliable criterion* for the establishment of *harmonious* relationships and structures within society.

Moreover, another fundamental *duality* requiring harmonious reconciliation can be discerned in the *relationship between human nature and education*. By *human nature* we mean those inherent capacities and inclinations rooted in one's biological constitution or acquired during the earliest stages of infancy and childhood. By *education* – or more broadly, *upbringing* – we refer to the influences received by the individual from their social environment, whether through structured processes or random life experiences.

Human nature and *education* alike exert a neutral or even *ineffectual*, if not *harmful*, influence on moral development – unless they are pertinently integrated. Moreover, *each* of these forces, acting alone

and without being synthesized with the other, proves insufficient. As Confucius insightfully noted:

> When natural endowment acts unilaterally, the result is a crude person; when cultivation alone prevails, the result is a pedant. Only when natural endowment and cultivation are harmoniously combined do we attain the superior individual – the virtuous person.[35]

However, even within *education itself*, a new *tension* emerges – namely, the need *to reconcile tradition with creativity*. Tradition alone renders individuals rigid and prevents them from adapting to life's evolving demands. On the other hand, creativity in isolation, detached from tradition, often expends itself fruitlessly, disregarding the *wisdom of the past*.

The "middle-of-the-road" approach here would consist of an indiscriminate attempt to connect past elements – *whether obsolete or enduring* – with present-day life. In contrast, true *harmony* lies in selecting *those values of the past* that are *timeless* and *relevant* to present needs and tendencies and using them as the basis for *new creative expressions*.

This process of transition – from inherited tradition to present-day innovation – is eloquently described by *Nietzsche* in his seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, particularly in the first of Zarathustra's discourses, titled *The Three Metamorphoses*. There, the German philosopher presents the human *Spirit* as first *kneeling like a camel*, bearing the weight of tradition and the imperative "you must," submitting dutifully to the values of its age.

Then, upon retreating into the desert, the spirit *rejects* this wisdom and throws off the burden of inherited norms *like a lion*, saying "No" and "I will." Finally, freed from the shackles of the past – but having retained all that is valuable from it – the spirit becomes *like a child*, who, as Nietzsche beautifully puts it, "is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a sacred Yes."[36]

e. Harmony as an Idea and as an Ideal

As illustrated by the above examples, the synthesis of opposites brings together subjective elements (such as natural talents or creative inspi-

---

[35] Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. William Edward Soothill (Fukuin Printing Co, 1910), VI, XVIII. On Confucius' ethical ontology, especially with reference to Dao and Li, see Georgios Steiris, "Confucius' Ontological Ethics," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 303-321.

[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Classics, 1961).

ration) with objective ones (like education or tradition), thereby enabling a fruitful and continuous dialogue between the individual and their environment in the service of Harmony. Naturally, there can also be a *gradation of harmonious unities*, from the less significant to the more essential, especially when viewed through the lens of Aristotelian moderation. Thus, for instance, courage – as the balance between cowardice and recklessness – and temperance – as the balance between licentiousness and insensibility – form, when regulated by prudence (phronesis), a new and higher-order harmony: the broader value of justice.[37]

More broadly, from all the aforementioned examples, *the notion of Harmony itself* can now be defined with greater precision. Heraclitus famously characterizes it as the union of opposites,[38] while the Pythagorean Philolaus[39] describes it as the fusion of the multiform and the concord of the dissenting: "ἔστι γάρ ἁρμονία πολυμιγέων ἕνωσις καί δίχα φρονεόντων συμφρόνησις."[40]

In Heraclitean thought, the terms "opposites" and "contraries" refer to phenomena that are often diametrically dissimilar, yet which – through the ceaseless motion and conflict of *becoming* – are ultimately led into a state of equilibrium, unity, and completeness. Crucial to this dynamic are the elements of divinity and *Logos*. It is evident, however, that *in Heraclitus' worldview the union of opposites does not signify their abolishment*; rather, it entails their coexistence and their potential for renewed conflict. Even when a temporary balance is achieved, the condition remains fluid, continuously ἐν τῷ γίγνεσθαι (in the state of becoming).

Yet, this conceptualization of Harmony leads onto slippery terrain, with no stable outlook. Admittedly, according to Heraclitus,[41] *Harmony* may indeed assume a more permanent form when it *coexists with the divine Logos*, the divine Law, and other transcendent entities that constitute the ἐπέκεινα (beyond) of Heraclitean thought. Still, even in this

---

[37] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a 20ff; cf. Plato, *Laws*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 10 & 11, trans. R. G. Bury (Harvard University Press, 1967-8), 631c ff.

[38] See especially Heraclitus, B 10 and B 8.

[39] Heraclitus, B 10.

[40] Regarding the correlation between harmony, numbers, and music according to Pythagoreans, cf. Nikolas K. Angelis, "Harmonie cosmique et Harmonie humaine," *Diotima: Revue de Recherche Philosophique* 29 (2001): 28-32, passim; and Virginia J. Grigoriadou et al., "History of the Concept of Similarity in Natural Sciences," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 107.

[41] Heraclitus, B 1, B 50, passim.

elevated metaphysical dimension, *Harmony cannot function as a stable and autonomous value*. For even there, it merely ensures the cohesion of the other cosmic entities without itself becoming an independent *synthesis* that reconciles every type of opposition – as, for example, in the earlier case of peace and war, whose synthesis lies in noble competition and εὖ ἀγωνίζεσθαι (fair play). And even if Heraclitus, as Long has rightly observed,[42] discovered "how to articulate rationality in terms of measured or proportional processes," he nevertheless did not go so far as to elevate *measure* into a principle of the synthesis of opposites.

This is why, in his *Symposium*, Plato – referring to Heraclitus' fragment B 51 on the bow and the lyre – has the physician Eryximachus voice objections to the Heraclitean doctrine. With a rationalist spirit, he argues that:

> Harmony is concord, and concord is a form of agreement. But agreement between things that are in opposition, insofar as they remain opposed, is impossible. Nor is it possible, conversely, to harmonize that which is in conflict and fails to agree.[43]

In the *Republic*, Plato offers a more detailed elaboration of his own position on the matter and specifies the potential of *Harmony to constitute a transcendence of opposites and a stable, balanced condition within the realm of the Ideal*. He begins by presenting, through the lens of the Idea of Justice, a state of harmonious coexistence among citizens – one that can and ought to be realized in well-governed cities.[44] This harmony is first based on the distinct roles that citizens are to fulfill; Plato distinguishes here three classes: (a) warriors, (b) rulers or magistrates, and (c) other professionals or farmers), and secondly, on the soul-faculty that typically or normatively governs each citizen's conduct in their role (for instance, magistrates are to be governed by reason.

In a second stage, Plato transfers this notion of harmony among the components of the well-ordered state to the personal life of the

---

[42] As mentioned in Despina Vertzagia, "Anthony A. Long. Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 345. Also, in Anthony Arthur Long and Despina Vertzagia, "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122.

[43] Plato, *Symposium*, 187a.

[44] Plato, *Republic*, 410e ff.

individual citizen.[45] In so doing, he posits that individuals too may enjoy the benefits of such harmony within their own souls, provided that the three parts of the soul – the appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν), the spirited (θυμοειδές) and the rational (λογιστικόν) – operate in a state of mutual balance and proportionality.[46]

From the above, it becomes evident that Plato conceptually associates Justice with Harmony and thereby implicitly *attributes to Harmony a distinctive ideal content*: one that provides human beings with a teleological orientation, allowing them to set aims and strive for their fulfillment across all spheres of activity. This applies particularly, as noted above, (a) to the functioning of a well-ordered *polis*, and (b) to the acquisition of internal harmony among the soul's faculties.

The elevation of Harmony to the status of an *Ideal* – one worthy of serving as a guiding principle and inner compass for human life – is powerfully expressed in a poem by Angelos Sikelianos, titled *The Consciousness of Personal Creation*:

O Harmony, above all deaths!
Shall not my hand extend
over all contradictions
calmly, like the branch of a plane tree,
like the hand of Apollo, straight and serene,
above the furious struggle
of Lapiths and Centaurs?[47]

A parallel poetic vision is found in Friedrich Schiller's *The Song of the Bell*, where in the opening of the eighth stanza he writes:

---

[45] Ibid., 441a ff.

[46] It is interesting to note that this Platonic approach to the tripartite classification of the human soul may find confirmation in the so-called "triune brain model," proposed in the 1960s by the American neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean. According to this model, the human brain is composed of three parts which, though independent, are interconnected and represent a gradual evolutionary development from the animal world to the human. Beginning with the so-called (a) *reptilian brain* (*reptilian complex*), which regulates basic sensorimotor functions – e.g., breathing – as well as *non-rational psychic energies*, such as drives and impulses, the model progresses to the (b) *paleomammalian complex*, which primarily governs emotions, and culminates more recently in the (c) *neomammalian complex* or *neocortex*, which regulates *abstract thought, logic, planning, high intelligence, problem-solving*, and the *simultaneous regulation of impulses, drives, and emotions* – see indicatively: https://en.m.wikipedia. org/wiki/Triune_brain. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1138b 7ff.

[47] Angelos Sikelianos, *Lyrical Life*, Vol. III (Ikaros, 1975) [in Greek].

Where sternness joins with tenderness,
and power is reconciled with gentleness,
there resounds the true purpose of harmony.[48]

Yet even in prose, the necessity of Harmony as an ideal and a high calling for the intellectual and spiritual life is vividly articulated in the following passage by Giorgos Theotokas:

> Beyond the problems of the moment, and beyond national or ideological borders, such appears to us the highest role of the spirit at the threshold of the New Times: to accomplish the enlargement of the soul so that it may contain and reconcile within itself Tradition and Revolution, Necessity and Freedom, the Collective and the Individual, Science and Poetry, Technique and Imagination, and the new religiosity that modern humanity so thirsts for – to make the soul capable of taming and humanizing the swollen and ailing body of our society – to recompose human reality and to create a new harmony in the Human Being and in the World [...].[49]

II. Forms of harmony

a. The concepts of external and internal harmony

Harmony, as the culmination of the greatest possible spiritual excellences of any given condition, and as a justification of human existence itself, constitutes an appealing *ideal*, undoubtedly connected to the notions of *the good* and *virtue*. As Socrates beautifully puts it in *Philebus*: "*Measure* and *proportion* result everywhere in beauty and virtue."[50]

At the same time, however, *Harmony* – emerging, as already noted, from the ongoing conflict of opposing forces – constitutes an *exceptionally precarious balance*, one that is difficult to attain and even more difficult to maintain.[51]

---

[48] Friedrich Schiller, *The Song of the Bell*, trans. W. H. Furness (Estes and Lauriat, 1887).

[49] Giorgos Theotokas, *At the Threshold of the New Times* (Ikaros, 1945), 24 [in Greek].

[50] Plato, *Philebus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1925), 64e. Furthermore, in Plato's *Republic*, 505a, special emphasis is placed on the *primacy of virtue and the Good* within a *harmonious whole* in human life, with the statement that "the idea of the Good is the highest object of knowledge [...]. Without it, neither just things nor anything else beneficial or worthwhile becomes truly useful."

[51] Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 1, trans. Harold North Fowler (Harvard Uni-

The same conflict, which is constantly played out in the *external* world between opposing powers (e.g., war and peace), and which may at times culminate in the ideal state of *external harmony* – in our example, through noble competition or ἅμιλλα (fair play) – also takes place *within the inner world of the human being* (as an individual or as a member of society). It unfolds primarily between forces that urge the soul toward a *spiritual elevation* and alignment with higher values capable of imparting meaning to one's life, and those that pull it in the opposite direction.

This internal struggle between conflicting forces within the human being has been poetically illustrated by great thinkers such as Goethe. In a well-known passage from *Faust*, he writes:

Two souls, alas, reside within my breast,
And each from the other would be parted:
One clings with stubborn passion to the world,
With clumsy lust, seeking love's sweetest zest;
The other soars from dust to high ancestral spheres.

Oh, if there be a spirit-breathing air,
That rules between the earth and heaven fair,
Descend with golden clouds from high,
And bear me to a brighter life on high![52]

In a similar vein, another German poet – somewhat younger than Goethe – Friedrich Hölderlin, in his poem *Hymn to the Goddess of Harmony*, exclaims:

Pure love, boundless, gently guides us
Toward the sublime harmony.[53]

Victor Hugo too, in his *Contemplations*, expresses this inner ethical striving in equally powerful terms:

Ever am I the one
Who walks straight toward duty,

---

versity Press, 1966), 92c; cf. Galen, *Mixtures*, ed. and trans. P. N. Singer and Philip J. van der Eijk (Oxford University Press, 2018), I, IX, 566.

[52] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor (London Ward, 1890), lines 1112–1121.

[53] Friedrich Hölderlin, "Hymne an die Göttin der Harmonie," in *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 1, 131-136 (Cottasche, 1946).

once honor has summoned me.
And like Job, I tremble in the wind, a fragile branch –
Yet I long for the good, the true,
the beautiful, the great, the just.[54]

Naturally, in every thought and action of the human being, elements of both his inner forces – those that stand in mutual conflict – are present. It is incumbent upon the human being – and indeed, this is the direction toward which he tends, provided, of course, that he is not 'asleep,' as Heraclitus observes[55] – to break the vicious cycle of fate and *to bring his inner powers into harmony*. This may occur if, in his responses and pursuits, the spiritual forces prevail – those oriented toward higher values that justify him as truly human – rather than the forces that Heraclitus describes as mere [animalistic] desires.[56] However, this effort is not without *serious difficulties*. As Ioannis Sykoutris notes:

> [...] The world that man carries within his breast is as vast as the external world – an *endless ocean*, with storms and fury, with the *countless laughter of waves* and its *unfathomable depths*, with *myriad forces* intertwining and contending among themselves. Each of these has its own worth and justification for existing. Thus, for those who keep their eyes open, the *problem of life* appears as a matter of *balance* among these forces – *a balance that constantly requires support and demands unceasing attention and effort*. Those who see life *one-sidedly*, who let themselves be swept along in a single direction, who shut their eyes to the *contradictions and varieties* of life, may perhaps be spared toil and worry; they may find rest or even sleep, because they have 'resolved' the problems of life. But *they are not living their own life – life is living them*. And the *more beautiful and richer*, the *deeper* a thing is, the more *difficulties and labors* it presupposes.[57]

Furthermore, certain other *timeless texts* vividly underscore not only the *difficulties involved* in the ascent toward the *realm of spiritual val-*

---

[54] Victor Hugo, *Les contemplations*, vol. 3, ed. Joseph Vianey (Hachette, 1922), 33.

[55] Heraclitus, B 89.

[56] Heraclitus, B 85.

[57] Ioannis Sykoutris, "The Spiritual Orientations of Youth," in *Essays and Articles*, 257-260 (Aigaio, 1956), 259.

ue, but also the *importance* of *properly balancing emotion* and *reason* in the success of such an effort. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet tells Horatio:

> Blessed are those whose blood and judgment
> are so well commingled.
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please.[58]

More pessimistically, Montaigne in his *Essays* observes: "It seems that the very name of virtue presupposes struggles, conflicts, and adversities."[59]

In contrast, the *Psalms* of David strike a somewhat more *optimistic* tone: "Those who *sow in tears* / shall *reap with rejoicing*"[60] – hence with no suggestion of problems arising during the harvest (either literally or metaphorically), due to the potential adversities that may have intervened.

A different perspective on the ascent into the spiritual world of Ideas – enriched with subtle strokes of irony – is offered by Emmanouil Rhoides. He writes:

> After one has arduously climbed a ladder of abstractions to the summit where Hegel's Idea stands – the One, the Whole, the Absolute, or some other such Principle – one feels a kind of distress, like that experienced by those who reach an untrodden mountain peak, where the air no longer has the density required to sustain life, and where no earthly sound is heard – not of running water, nor rustling leaves, nor the buzzing of an insect. But man was not made to dwell at such heights [...].[61]

This metaphorical image, however vivid, refers evidently to the biological constitution of the human being, which can indeed falter in the face

---

[58] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Rex Gibson (Cambridge University Press, 2005), Act III, Scene II, lines 68-71). On the *need for a well-balanced mixture of emotions and reason*, see also Plato, *Republic*, 442a ff.

[59] Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Charles Cotton, rev. William Carew Hazlett (Edwin C. Hill, 1910), Book II, Chapter 11.

[60] *The Psalms of David*, trans. and ed. Donald Sheehan and Xenia Sheehan (Wipf and Stock, 2013), Psalm 126 [LXX: 125], 5-6.

[61] Emmanouil Rhoides, "Unpublished Thoughts," *Erevna* 7 (1932): 3-15 [in Greek].

of difficulty. It does not, however, apply to his *psychic faculties, which,* on the contrary, I believe *are fashioned to lead him toward perfection*, provided he truly wills it – as Paulo Coelho puts it in *The Alchemist*, "with all his heart." In such a case, "the universe will conspire to help him succeed."[62]

If, however, a person succeeds in harmonizing their inner forces – and thereby attains the *inner Harmony of the soul*[63] – then they naturally acquire a significant axiological supremacy of spiritual powers and can draw from them substantial benefit.

Even the *less spiritual goods – such as wealth, health, or physical beauty* – when *governed by the Nous* (Reason/Mind), can also be put to meaningful use: both as *means* for achieving inner harmony (as the well-known maxim has it: "a sound mind in a sound body"), and as a *bridge* by which Reason may realistically connect itself with the world of lived reality – without indulging in escapist abstractions.

More broadly, the *Nous* plays a central role in revealing to the human being both external and internal Harmony, aided, of course, by the other psychic forces identified in Heraclitean thought: namely *faith, will, intuition,* and *enthusiasm.* In any case, the revelation of Harmony must be the fruit of personal effort by the individual who seeks to know it – and not the result of simply copying or mimicking a form of "Harmony" found elsewhere, which more often than not fails to correspond to the cultural and social needs or conditions of a given society.

Between *external Harmony*, as an ideal in the external world, and *internal Harmony*, as a state of balance in the human soul, there exists a *close and reciprocal relationship*: The person who apprehends the *external Harmony* of the world sets for their soul a spiritual direction, in pursuit of which they will employ their corresponding spiritual resources. Yet in using these resources, those spiritual capacities are themselves cultivated and come to prevail over the non-spiritual ones, thereby bringing about *internal Harmony*.

Conversely, the person who achieves *internal Harmony* thereby creates the necessary conditions for their spirit to apprehend and realize *external Harmony*.

Thus, when the two forms of Harmony come into contact – when, that is, the spiritual merits of a given state (as ideals) come into con-

---

[62] Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* (HarperOne, 2014).

[63] It should be noted, however, that neither Plato (e.g., *Phaedo*, 92a ff.) nor Aristotle (*De anima*, 407b 27ff.) accepted that the *soul as such is harmony*. A thorough and penetrating analysis of the topic from the perspective of Platonic philosophy may be found in Evangelos Moutsopoulos, *La Musique dans l'œuvre de Platon* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 321ff.

tact with a person who has already successfully resolved their inner conflict – then the *identification* of the two Harmonies occurs. In other words, *external Harmony*, in its absolute and static form, comes and settles within the soul of the person who is inwardly harmonized.

b. The Hegelian triadic structure and its relation to harmony

Relevant in this context is also Hegel's view, as formulated especially in his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, particularly in the introduction of that work. There, Hegel distinguishes between *subjective will* and *objective will*.

Subjective will expresses individual freedom – that is, the human capacity to set personal goals and to act according to one's inner convictions and personal ethics. In contrast, *objective will* expresses what is universally valid – the established moral order, which is embodied in institutions such as law and the state, and is actualized through the historical development of society.

When *subjective will* coincides with *objective will* – that is, when the individual recognizes and embraces the general will as expressed in the institutions of law and the state – *then true freedom is achieved*: not arbitrary choice, but the conscious integration into universal ethical life.

This reconciliation does not signify a retreat into a transcendent "world of ideas," but rather the *spiritual fulfillment of the human being within real life and history*, as affirmed by the Hegelian principle that "the rational is real" (Vernunft ist Wirklichkeit).

Hegel developed *similar theories in other works* as well, such as the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) and the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1817), where he outlines the *triadic progression of Spirit toward its fulfillment* through institutions and the highest manifestations of the mind. Specifically, *subjective spirit* is expressed in individual consciousness, thought, will, and personal ethics; *objective spirit* is embodied in the institutions of law, morality, and social life; and *absolute spirit*, as the unity and transcendence of the former two, is revealed in the highest forms of the human spirit: *art*, *religion*, and *philosophy*. At this highest level, Spirit achieves *self-knowledge*, recognizing itself as the rational principle that permeates and unifies reality.

Hegel has at times been associated with the *triadic schema thesis – antithesis – synthesis*, which appears to bear similarities to what has been discussed here concerning Harmony. However, it is important to note that *Hegel himself does not explicitly adopt this schema*, nor does he employ the terms *These – Antithese – Synthese*.

In fact, these terms were later introduced by Hegelian students as a schematic rendering of the *dialectical method* employed by Hegel. According to this method, thought develops through contradictions and their transcendence, with each contradiction necessarily leading to the next, into a higher unity. Yet this unity is never final, for the process continues in a *spiral-like movement*, through continuous transcensions.

An *example* of this dialectical method is developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where – for the sake of clarity – terms from the triadic model are added in its present exposition. In a first stage ("thesis"), the individual perceives the world through the senses (immediate certainty). Then, they become aware of the relativity of their experiences and the presence of subjectivity ("antithesis"). Finally, they are led to *self-consciousness* and the recognition of themselves within objective reality (Aufhebung / sublation), where *subjective and objective perspectives are integrated* ("synthesis").

This progression is not merely internal or psychological, but *logical-ontological*: it concerns the *self-development of Spirit*, as it is expressed in *art*, *religion*, and *philosophy*.

With regard to *the concept of Harmony,* it *does not occupy a central place in Hegel's dialectic, nor does it function as a logical foundation*. Although in aesthetic or moral contexts one may encounter notions akin to *Harmony* (such as the reconciliation of contradictions within the moral community or within a work of art), the essence of Hegelian philosophy does not seek *balance*, as is the focus of the present study on *Harmony*, but rather *unity through the dynamic transcendence of contradictions*. Therefore, *these Hegelian views are less closely related to the views developed here and more aligned with Heraclitean ideas*, which Hegel, as he himself admits, fully endorses – stating in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that "there is no saying of Heraclitus that I have not incorporated into my Logic."[64]

More specifically, Hegel – regarding the triadic schema attributed to him (thesis – antithesis – synthesis) – focuses his attention on the *evolutionary development of the human being toward spiritual fulfillment* through the overcoming of contradictions. However, unlike the present study, he does not attempt to clarify what exactly constitutes the "synthesis" in each pair of opposites – for example, between *freedom* and *order*. Moreover, he does not explain how such contradictions may be overcome within the *inner world of the human being*, so as to bring about their resolution and hence a *harmonious synthesis*.

---

[64] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1802), 279.

Finally, with regard to the *coincidence of subjective and objective will*, Hegel – though he sets as both goal and content the spiritual fulfillment of the individual – does not associate this fulfillment with *Harmony*, but rather with the alignment of *subjective morality* (Moralität) and *objective ethics* (Sittlichkeit), in such a way that *individual freedom* is combined with the *objective order* of law and institutions. Although this state presupposes some form of *internal unity*, *Hegel does not describe it in terms of Harmony, but as a self-conscious unity of freedom with necessity*.

c. The need for a dynamic harmony leading toward static, external harmony

As noted above, the convergence – or even identification – of *external* and *internal Harmony* presents, as an ideal, particular difficulties in its realization, and thus cannot be regarded as an easily attainable goal for the *many*. In particular, *most people*, due to their *inherent limitations* and the *ever-changing nature of their personality over time*, *rarely achieve internal Harmony,* and even when they do, they retain it only briefly before relapsing into new internal conflict. From this perspective, Heraclitus was not mistaken in considering *Harmony* to be something *ephemeral*, and in doubting whether the majority of his fellow citizens were capable of achieving it.[65]

What is therefore required, in view of the ever-changing circumstances and the intrinsic weaknesses of human nature, is a different form of *Harmony* – a *dynamic Harmony*. This ever-shifting form of Harmony would serve to link the individual's *potentialities*, which may lack *inner Harmony*, whether as a person or as a member of a collective, to the (absolute) *external Harmony*.

Accordingly, in this case, *equilibrium* would serve to connect *external, static Harmony* as an ideal (e.g., *noble competition*) with the individual's current *psychological state*. In a sense, *dynamic Harmony* fuses *the real with the ideal*, with a tendency for the human being to move from problematic reality toward *static Harmony* – that is, toward the realm of the ideal, which, according to Plato, emerges as a *combination and blending of the infinite with the finite*.[66]

Naturally, the greater the individual's level of spirituality, the more *spiritually valuable elements* they will be able to receive from *external Harmony* and make use of. Respectively, with each new personal vic-

[65] Heraclitus, B 1, B 2, B 72, B 17, B 34, among others.

[66] *Philebus*, 25 a ff.

tory in the fight against non-spiritual forces, one draws closer to the realization of *external, static Harmony*. And indeed, it seems that the soul strives for the gradual acquisition of virtues and harmony, as a directed activity that unifies multiplicity.[67]

But what are the elements upon which *dynamic Harmony* is built? Three may be considered the most important. Specifically, the ideal of *static, external Harmony* is dynamically adapted to the circumstances of each case, based on:

(a) existing needs and conditions,
(b) the individual's unique personality, and
(c) the limits they are capable of reaching, including their *capacity for adaptation to new situations*.

In particular, the third element carries special weight, as it is linked to the factor of *self-knowledge*. Cicero, in his *De officiis*, aptly writes:

> We must act in such a way that we do not come into conflict with the universal laws of human nature, but rather preserve them, while at the same time following – as far as possible – our own individual nature.[68]

Similarly, Kostis Palamas, in his *The Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*, extols the importance of adaptability: "I know all the songs / but to sing them well / I tune each one / to my own melody."[69]

Therefore, the *adaptation of the ideal to the circumstances and contingencies of each case*, as the basis of *dynamic Harmony*, implies that the pursuit of *static Harmony in its totality* is not always appropriate. On the contrary, *the effort must proceed step by step, according to each person's capabilities and the prevailing circumstances.*

Furthermore, it is important to stress that in the shaping of *dynamic Harmony* – through which the *normative ideal* (Sollen) is translated into the reality of *being* (Sein) – excess is also among the tools employed. That is, even though we are speaking here of *Harmony*, it may take the form of *exaggeration* in order to "straighten the tree" and ultimately bring about its *static realization*.

---

[67] See John R. Bagby, "Aristotle and Aristoxenus on Effort," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2021): 51-74.

[68] M. Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Harvard University Press, 1913), I, XXXI.

[69] Kostis Palamas, *The Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*, trans. George Thomson (Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), Fifth Lay, stanza 24.

As noted at the beginning of this study, evolving situations tend to follow a developmental arc; when they reach a point of extremity (e.g., *absolute freedom within a society drifting toward anarchy*), they are typically succeeded by their direct opposite (in this case: *absolute discipline through authoritarian governance*), or the reverse may occur (from *harsh authoritarian rule* to *excessive freedom*). Naturally, both of these extremes are to be avoided. Thus, in such circumstances, *dynamic Harmony* operates using *excess* as a tool (in this case, either *absolute discipline* or *excessive freedom*, depending on the situation), for the purpose of achieving the ideal of *Eunomia* (Lawfullness) – that is, the *static, external form of Harmony* between *freedom* and *order*.

It is worth noting here that a form of *dynamic Harmony* aimed at *restoring justice* is also explicitly recognized in the Greek Constitution itself.[70] This provision goes beyond the general proclamation of equality for all Greeks (Art. 4 of the Constitution) and provides for what is often termed *affirmative action* – that is, measures in support of vulnerable groups. It states that:

> Positive measures taken to promote equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination on grounds of sex. The State shall take measures to eliminate inequalities that exist in practice, especially to the detriment of women.[71]

Thus, the constitutional legislator permits the adoption of measures that diverge from the *principle of equality* and benefit specific social groups (typically vulnerable ones), when such measures address the *existing imbalances between legal* (constitutional) *and insufficient actual equality*, in this case, between men and women.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the *external Harmonies* that one constructs by balancing opposites are traversed by a common unifying thread. Precisely because *Harmonies* are all achieved through the maximization of what is (absolutely or relatively) spiritually beneficial, they are all imbued with *spirituality*, which connects them as an indissoluble cohesive force.

---

[70] Hellenic Parliament, *The Constitution of Greece*, trans. Xenophon Paparrigopoulos and Stavroula Vassilouni (Hellenic Parliament, 2022), Art. 116 §2.

[71] Ibid.

By virtue of this role, *Harmony* becomes the *life-giving force in the souls of human beings*, as it endows them, according to Ioannis Theodorakopoulos "with *moral value*."[72] In a way, the individual *Harmonies* constitute *mosaic fragments*, which together compose the *entire substance of spirituality*.

In the case of *static Harmony*, this will occur in an *absolute* manner, such that *noble competition* (ἅμιλλα), for example, appears *intrinsically linked* with *eunomia* (lawfulness or good order). In *dynamic Harmony*, however, *spirituality* likewise extends through all individual Harmonies – but now in proportion to *the capacities of each particular person*.

For instance, to the extent that a given person is inclined toward achieving *noble competition*, so too will they be inclined toward *eunomia*, as a *consequence of the inner Harmony they have cultivated within themselves*. And this inclination will gain more and more ground, provided that one earnestly strives toward it, "ἕως οὖ δικαιοσύνη ἐπιστρέψῃ εἰς κρίσιν καί ἐχόμενοι αὐτής πάντες οἱ εὐθεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ"[73] or, alternatively, as Heraclitus would put it, "ἕως οὖ πάντα γάρ τό πῦρ ἐπελθόν κρινεί καί καταλήψεται."[74] In other words, with a combined rendering of these two sayings: [...] Until the divinity, in the form of Justice, comes forth and judges all things according to the Logos and takes possession of them, at which point all those who are pure in heart will cleave to it [...].

References

Angelis, Nikolas K. "Harmonie cosmique et Harmonie humaine." *Diotima: Revue de Recherche Philosophique* 29 (2001): 28-32.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19. Translated by H. Rackham. Harvard University Press, 1934.

Aristotle. *Posterior Analytics*. Translated by E. S. Bouchier. B. H. Blackwell, 1901.

Bagby, John R. "Aristotle and Aristoxenus on Effort." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2021): 51-74. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.25682.

---

[72] Ioannis Theodorakopoulos, *Introduction to Plato* (Rodi, 1970), 225 [in Greek].

[73] "[...] until justice returns to judgment, and all the upright in heart follow after it." *The Psalms in Greek according to the Septuagint*, ed. Henry Barkley Swete (Cambridge University Press, 1896), 93:15.

[74] "[until] fire, when it comes, will judge all things and take hold of them." Heraclitus, B 66.

Bowra, Cecil Maurice. *The Greek Experience*. Mentor Books, 1957.

Cicero, Tullius Marcus. *De officiis*. Translated by Walter Miller. Harvard University Press, 1913.

Coelho, Paulo. *The Alchemist*. HarperOne, 2014.

Confucius. *The Analects*. Translated by William Edward Soothill. Fukuin Printing Co, 1910.

Courakis, Nestor. "In Search for a New Eutopia in Criminal Policy: The Role of Social Justice." In *Ceremonial Presentation of the Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Nestor Courakis*, 40-57. Max-Planck Gesellschaft, 2017.

Courakis, Nestor. "Security and Freedom: Their Static and Dynamic Boundaries." *Nomiko Vima* 54 (2006): 1217-1226 [in Greek].

Dahrendorf, R. *Classes et conflits de classes dans la société industrielle*. Mouton, 1972.

Diels, Hermann, und Walther Kranz. *Die Fragmente den Vorsokratiker*. Weidmannsche Hildesheim, 2004.

Egbekpalu, Purissima Emelda, Paschal Onyi Oguno, and Princewill Iheanyi Alozie. "Dialectics of War as a Natural Phenomenon: Existential Perspective." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 129-145. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35281.

Ertl, Paul. "Progressus as an Explanatory Model: An Anthropological Principle Illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine War." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 175-194. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35250.

Galen. *Mixtures*. Edited and translated by P. N. Singer and Philip J. van der Eijk. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust*. Translated by Bayard Taylor. London Ward, 1890.

Grigoriadou, Virginia J., Frank A. Coutelieris, and Kostas Theologou. "History of the Concept of Similarity in Natural Sciences." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 101-123. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/cjp.22955.

Gryparis, Yiannis. *Scarab Beetles and Terracottas*. I. N. Sideris, 1943 [in Greek].

Heck, Philipp. *Begriffsbildung und Interessenjurisprudenz*. C. B. Mohr, 1932.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1. Translated by E. S. Haldane. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1802.

Hellenic Parliament. *The Constitution of Greece*. Translated by Xenophon Paparrigopoulos and Stavroula Vassilouni. Hellenic Parliament, 2022.

Hőlderlin, Friedrich. "Hymne an die Göttin der Harmonie." In *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 1. Cottasche, 1946.

Hugo, Victor. *Les contemplations*, vol. 3. Edited by Joseph Vianey. Hachette, 1922.

Jaspers, Karl. *Les grands philosophes*, Vol. 4. Plon, 1972.

Kallinikos, Panagiotis. "Political Realism in the Chinese Warring States Period and the European Renaissance: Han Fei and Machiavelli." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 127-166. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.29669.

Kitto, Humphrey D. F. *The Greeks*. Penguin Books, 1951.

Korais, Adamantios. "Prolegomena." In *Aristotle's Politics*. Elliniki Vivliothiki, 1821 [in Greek].

Long, Anthony Arthur, and Despina Vertzagia. "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.23324.

Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*. Translated by Gregory Heys. Modern Library, 2013.

Meyer, Jürgen. *Dialektik im Strafprozeß*. C. B. Mohr, 1965.

Montaigne, Michel de. *Essays*. Translated by Charles Cotton, revised by William Carew Hazlett. Edwin C. Hill, 1910.

Moutsopoulos, Evangelos *La Musique dans l'œuvre de Platon*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1959.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Penguin Classics, 1961.

Palamas, Kostis. *The Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*. Translated by George Thomson. Lawrence & Wishart, 1969.

Pattichi, Maria. *Measure of Balance: The Legacy of Greek Civilization to the Western World*. Nicosia, 1972 [in Greek].

Pindar. *Olympian Odes*. In Diane Arnson Svarlien, editor, *The Odes of Pindar*. Perseus Project 1.0. Yale University Press, 1991.

Plato. *Laws*. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 10 & 11. Translated by R. G. Bury. Harvard University Press, 1967-8.

Plato. *Phaedo*. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 1. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Harvard University Press, 1966.

Plato. *Philebus*. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9. Translated by Harold N. Fowler. Harvard University Press, 1925.

Plato. *Republic*. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 5. Translated by Paul Shorey. Harvard University Press, 1969.

Plato. *Statesman*. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12. Translated by Harold N. Fowler. Harvard University Press, 1921.

Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by R. G. Bury. Heffer and Sons, 1909.

Ramage, Craufurd Tait. *Familiar Quotations from French and Italian Authors*. Routledge, 1886.

Rhoides, Emmanouil. "Unpublished Thoughts." *Erevna* 7 (1932): 3-15 [in Greek].

Saint Basil the Great. *To the Young on How They Might Profit from Pagan Literature*. Edited by V. Bilalis. Grigoris, 1989 [in Greek].

Schiller, Friedrich. *The Song of the Bell*. Translated by W. H. Furness. Estes and Lauriat, 1887.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Rex Gibson. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Sikelianos, Angelos. *Lyrical Life*, Vol. III. Ikaros, 1975 [in Greek].

Steiris, Georgios. "Confucius' Ontological Ethics." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 303-321. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.32081.

Sykoutris, Ioannis. "The Spiritual Orientations of Youth." In *Essays and Articles*, 257-260. Aigaio, 1956.

The Psalms in Greek according to the Septuagint. Edited by Henry Barkley Swete. Cambridge University Press, 1896.

The Psalms of David. Translated and edited by Donald Sheehan and Xenia Sheehan. Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Theodorakopoulos, Ioannis. *Introduction to Plato*. Rodi, 1970 [in Greek].

Theotokas, Giorgos. *At the Threshold of the New Times*. Ikaros, 1945 [in Greek].

Trikoupis, Charilaos. *Analekta*, Vol. III. Sakellariou, 1912 [in Greek].

United Nations Security Council. *Expert Report*. United Nations, 2006, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/Social Justice.pdf.

Vertzagia, Despina. "Anthony A. Long. Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 339-353. doi: https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34784.

Weber, Frank G. *The Evasive Neutral: Germany, Britain, and the Quest for a Turkish Alliance in the Second World War*. University of Missouri Press, 1983.