

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HARMONY: RETHINKING HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This article explores the philosophical concept of harmony in the context of human-nature relations, emphasizing its relevance in the 21st century. Drawing from both Western and Eastern traditions, the study examines how ecological crises highlight the necessity of rethinking anthropocentric worldviews. By integrating Indonesian philosophical perspectives rooted in local wisdom, the article demonstrates how harmony can serve as a guiding principle for sustainable development and global ethics.

Keywords: philosophy, harmony, human-nature relations, sustainability, Indonesian wisdom.

Introduction

The 21st century presents humanity with unprecedented challenges: climate change, environmental degradation, and a crisis of meaning in the face of rapid technological development. Traditional anthropocentric philosophies have often placed humans above nature, treating it as a resource to be exploited. However, both classical philosophical traditions and local cultural wisdom suggest an alternative worldview: one based on harmony and interdependence.

Indonesian philosophy, influenced by diverse cultural heritages such as Javanese, Balinese, and Dayak traditions, highlights the importance of balance between human beings, nature, and the divine. This perspective provides an essential contribution to contemporary philosophical debates on sustainability and global ethics.

Main Body

1. Harmony in Classical Philosophy

The idea of harmony has been central to philosophical inquiry since antiquity. In ancient Greek philosophy, Heraclitus argued that the cosmos exists through a unity of opposites, where conflict leads to balance. Aristotle later advanced the notion of the *golden mean*, emphasizing

moderation and proportionality as the foundation of ethical life. Similarly, the Stoics highlighted living “according to nature” as a way to achieve inner peace and universal order.

In the East, Confucian thought defined harmony (*he*) as a core social virtue, essential for cultivating relationships and sustaining political order. Taoism, on the other hand, introduced the concept of *Dao* as the natural flow of the universe, stressing that human beings should live in accordance with nature rather than attempting to control it. These traditions collectively reveal that harmony is not merely a cultural ideal but a universal philosophical principle that transcends civilizations.

2. Indonesian Wisdom and Philosophical Perspectives

Indonesia’s philosophical heritage enriches global discourse on harmony. The Javanese concept of *Rukun* refers to the maintenance of social balance and the avoidance of conflict. This principle guides community life, rituals, and interpersonal relations, reflecting the belief that collective well-being is inseparable from individual well-being.

Balinese philosophy introduces *Tri Hita Karana*, which literally means “three causes of well-being”: harmony among humans, harmony with nature, and harmony with the divine. This worldview is reflected in Balinese architecture, agriculture, and festivals, emphasizing a holistic approach to life. Similarly, the Dayak traditions in Borneo uphold ecological balance by considering forests sacred spaces that sustain both spiritual and material existence. These philosophies challenge the modern tendency to separate humans from their environment and instead affirm interconnectedness.

3. Critique of Anthropocentrism

The modern era, dominated by industrialization and technological growth, has often been built upon an anthropocentric worldview, placing human needs above all other forms of life. This has led to the overexploitation of natural resources, climate instability, and biodiversity loss. Philosophers such as Arne Naess, through deep ecology, call for recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings, independent of human use. Hans Jonas, meanwhile, formulated the principle of responsibility, urging humanity to consider the long-term consequences of its actions on future generations and the biosphere.

By integrating these global philosophical critiques with Indonesian concepts of harmony, a unique ethical synthesis emerges: one that resists domination and affirms interdependence. This synthesis can provide a valuable alternative framework for addressing ecological and ethical crises.

4. Harmony as a Principle for Global Ethics

The universal relevance of harmony lies in its potential to shape global ethics. Harmony is not passive acceptance but active engagement in creating balance across all dimensions of life—social, ecological, spiritual, and political. When applied globally, harmony promotes peace among nations, equitable resource distribution, and environmental sustainability.

For instance, intercultural philosophy demonstrates that values of balance and respect appear across traditions—from African Ubuntu to Native American cosmologies—which indicates a shared human concern for coexistence. Placing harmony at the heart of global ethics could help transcend cultural differences and build a more cooperative international order.

5. Practical Implications

Philosophy becomes transformative when applied to concrete realities. Harmony can inspire public policy aimed at sustainable development, such as eco-friendly urban planning, renewable energy adoption, and inclusive education systems. At the community level, local wisdom can be revitalized through environmental education that integrates traditional ecological knowledge with modern science.

Moreover, in the digital era, harmony can guide our relationship with technology. Instead of allowing technology to dominate human life, philosophy encourages a balanced approach where technological progress serves human flourishing without undermining ecological or ethical values. Thus, harmony is not only a theoretical principle but also a practical tool for addressing contemporary dilemmas.

Conclusion

The philosophy of harmony provides a timeless yet urgent framework for understanding human-nature relations in the 21st century. As environmental crises intensify and global inequalities widen, the call for balance becomes more relevant than ever. Harmony transcends cultural and historical boundaries, uniting traditions from Greek thought to Indonesian wisdom in a shared recognition of interdependence.

From a philosophical standpoint, harmony challenges the dominance of anthropocentric paradigms and offers a more inclusive, ecocentric worldview. From a practical perspective, it provides guidance for policies, education, and everyday practices that respect both human needs and ecological limits. By bridging theory and practice, harmony can serve as a foundation for global ethics that prioritize sustainability, justice, and peace.

For Indonesia and other culturally diverse nations, the revival of local wisdom such as *Rukun* and *Tri Hita Karana* affirms that indigenous philosophies hold global significance.

These traditions not only enrich academic discourse but also offer living models for building more sustainable and humane societies.

Ultimately, the philosophy of harmony is not a utopian ideal but a necessary response to contemporary crises. By embracing harmony as both a philosophical principle and a practical ethic, humanity can move toward a future where progress and preservation coexist, and where human dignity is inseparable from respect for the natural world.

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