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Introduction

The concept of harmony is an overarching philosophy found in many cultures both ancient and modern. In the universe, all things are relational, interconnected and exist in a state of equilibrium. Harmony asks questions, it is a way of looking at the interconnectedness of our world and providing a framework for policy and practice (Campion, 2020 pp. 21-22)¹. This essay compares and contrasts Addey Crystal's paper 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism'² with Li Chenyang's paper 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony.'³ Both papers seek to articulate and uncover the concept of Harmony through the lens of Neoplatonism and Confucianism.

Contextualising the Papers: Authors, Subject Matter and Intentions

It is necessary to situate the two papers based on the philosophical background of the authors, the subject matter they discuss, intended readership and when the texts were written. This provides an understanding and interpretation of the presented arguments.

¹ Nicholas Campion, 'Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future* (Wales: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21-22.

² Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21–38.

³ Chenyang Li, 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony'. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 583–603.

Crystal Addey is a University lecturer in the Department of Classics at University College Cork in Ireland. She is a part-time tutor at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in the UK. Her research interests include Neoplatonism, Divination, Oracles, Theurgy, Platonic tradition, late antique philosophy and the relationship between ancient philosophy and the natural world. Addey has published numerous articles and book chapters on the role of oracles and divination within ancient philosophy paying particular attention to late antique Theurgy. To date she is an elected member of the Board of Directors for the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies (Freni, 2021)⁴. Her paper 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Neoplatonism' was edited by Nicholas Campion and published in 2020 in 'The Harmony Debates'⁵.

Crystal Addey's (2020) paper examines the Neoplatonic understanding of Harmony which flourished in the 2nd to the 7th centuries. Drawing on Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, she argues that the cosmos is a single living being with a soul, reason and intelligence and humans are the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm that is visible and non-visible. Furthermore, she argues that although the cosmos is in a harmonious state, human souls lost their intrinsic harmonious state therefore they must restore that harmonious state by

⁴ Giulia Freni, review of *Divination and Knowledge in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, by Crystal Addey (Routledge, 2021), *The Byzantine Review*, 4 (2022), p. 49-54.

⁵ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21–38.

assimilating with the harmonious universe (Addey, 2020 p. 27)⁶. The paper is intended for philosophers, scholars and university students.

Li Chenyang is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and founder of philosophy at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. He specialises in research in Chinese philosophy and comparative philosophy, with extensive publications in classical Confucianism. Some of his most important works include *'Reshaping Confucianism: A Progressive Enquiry'* (Oxford University Press, 2023); *'The Tao Encounters the West: Explorations in Comparative Philosophy'* (1999) and *'The Sage and The Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics and Gender'* (2000). He was the founding president of Association of Chinese Philosophers in North America (ACPA) and President of International Society for Chinese Philosophy (ISCP). He currently serves on the editorial boards of over twenty scholarly publications (Li, no date).⁷

⁶ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF p. 27.

⁷ Chenyang Li, (no date) *Prof Li Chenyang, DR-NTU* [online]. Available at: <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/entities/person/Li-Chenyang> (Accessed: 22 March 2026).

His paper on the Confucian ideal of Harmony was first written in 2002⁸ and published in 2006⁹, he examines the understanding of harmony in Confucian tradition, its applications and justification in today`s philosophy and world-cultural politics. His study distinguishes harmony and sameness, providing a framework on the use of rites and rituals in politics. Li proposes a Confucian ideology based theoretical framework, the Confucian-harmony model to solve real life problems (Li, 2006)¹⁰. The paper is intended for university students, philosophers and general academic readers.

This section has provided the context of the papers and what each author specialises in together with a history of their publications. based on Freni`s (2021) research¹¹, Addey Crystal is a specialist in Neoplatonism whose paper ‘The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Neoplatonism’ provides an understanding of our need to assimilate with the cosmos to restore harmony. On the other hand, Li Chenyang is a specialist in Chinese philosophy particularly Confucianism and his paper ‘Confucian Ideal of Harmony’ (2006)¹² reflects the Confucian

⁸ Chenyang Li, ‘The Confucian Ideal of Harmony’. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), p. 601.

⁹ Chenyang Li, ‘The Confucian Ideal of Harmony’. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 583–603.

¹⁰ Chenyang Li, ‘The Confucian Ideal of Harmony’. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 583–603.

¹¹ Giulia Freni, review of *Divination and Knowledge in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, by Crystal Addey (Routledge, 2021), *The Byzantine Review*, 4 (2022), p. 49-54.

¹² Chenyang Li, ‘The Confucian Ideal of Harmony’. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 583–603.

ideal of harmony and its distinction from sameness and explores its justification in today's governance. Both papers give an overview of the meanings of harmony in different contexts and applications of the ideologies in achieving harmony.

Summary of the two papers

Before comparing and contrasting the two papers, it is necessary to briefly summarise what the papers are about, their main arguments, how they deal with the subject matter and what their texts set out to investigate.

Addey Crystal's (2020) paper 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Neoplatonism'¹³ emphasises that harmony is an important element of Neoplatonism influenced by Pythagorean tradition and Plato. Addey (2020) demonstrates that Neoplatonism underpins metaphysics, cosmology, ethics, psychology and approaches towards ritual and soteriology. Her paper is grounded on the ideas of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus who maintained that the cosmos is a single living being with a soul, reasoning and intelligence. Human beings are microcosms containing a smaller scale of the macrocosm¹⁴ (Addey, 2020).

The early Neoplatonists argued for a series of hypostases with a hierarchy from the One, identified as the source of all things and associated with goodness followed by the Intellect and

¹³ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21–38.

¹⁴Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF p. 21.

the Soul¹⁵. Plotinus claims that the World Soul and individual soul have a relationship based on sympathy with the potential to connect human soul with the divine. Iamblichus and Proclus practiced Theurgy with the goal of assimilating and uniting with the divine through ritual practices associated with symbols such as divination, prayers, invocation and sacrifice. Theurgy is based on the idea of interconnectedness to each other, the cosmos and the gods and if we remember the divine harmony we can dance with the cosmos and the gods (Addey, 2020).

In metaphysics, the universe is claimed to be caused by the intelligible cosmos that in turn causes everything in the universe. The intelligible cosmos is real existence which comprises of the causes of the perceptible realm¹⁶. Despite the harmony of the cosmos, the human soul is believed to have lost its harmonious state as it descended into the mortal body. Addey argues that traces of the divine illumination surrounds us and it is the task of every human being to assume the right relationship and attune to the harmony of the world and the gods¹⁷ (Addey, 2020).

¹⁵ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21–22.

¹⁶ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 21–22.

¹⁷ Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF pp. 29-33.

The main aim of Li Chenyang's (2006) paper is to elucidate the Confucian concept and ideal of Harmony. In Confucianism, Harmony is known as 'He' and sameness as 'tong'. Harmony presupposes the existence of different things and implies a favourable relation among them, it is metaphysical, relational and does not imply perfect agreement.¹⁸ Sameness inhibits growth whereas harmony thrives in diversity as seen in classical examples of ancient kings in their marriages and acquisition of wealth. In politics, government officials with different opinions make a strong government (Li, 2006).

Li (2006) draws on the classical text, *Zhongyong* which articulates harmony as the great way under heaven and centrality as the great foundation under heaven. To achieve centrality and harmony, heaven and earth must maintain their positions and myriad things flourish, this he argues is at the heart of Confucian metaphysics¹⁹ (Li, 2006). He contends that strife is inherent in harmony and difference-as-tension and opposition are the preconditions of harmony and without them there is sameness. However, elimination is not a Confucian way of harmony, if inevitable, it is assigned instrumental value as a means to achieving harmony²⁰.

When compared to Christianity, Confucianism does not hold an anthropocentric view of God as the creator. Instead it posits that the world was created out of disorder, the absence of a pre-set order conditions the world to generate order of its own. Confucianism believes in a Triad forming Heaven, Earth and Humanity thus the Heaven must achieve order through coordination

¹⁸Chenyang Li, 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony'. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), p. 589.

¹⁹ Chenyang Li, 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony'. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 583–588.

²⁰ Chenyang Li, 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony'. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 591-592.

with the other members of the Triad. Confucians maintain faith in the goodness of humanity and when there are differences between both sides which are good, there is need to negotiate with minimal confrontation. Li (2006) argues that this way of thinking fosters openness and the willingness to negotiate opposed to engaging in conquest. This ideal of harmony provokes an attitude of seeking harmony in resolving cultural and international conflicts. He justifies this approach on four value based claims as the best way to deal with conflict harmoniously. He suggests that dealing with conflict in the Confucian way provides more stability at a less cost to humanity²¹ (Li, 2006).

Analysis of the papers

A comparative analysis essay analyses the writing styles used by each author taking note of how the prose flows and the methodological approach used. Crystal Addey's paper is not very easy to follow because it does not provide an introduction of the preceding topic and the aim of the essay is not stated. Some of the ideas are repeated in different paragraphs making the text feel rhetorical. Although she provides clear definitions of technical words and organizes her ideas into clearly labelled paragraphs, the sentences are overly long making the reader lose track of the critical idea. In addition to this, Addey (2020) does not use examples related to modern everyday life which makes the paper less relatable to non-technical readers. She focuses her writing on Neoplatonism and does not engage alternative perspectives which may simply be a reflection of a focused approach.

By contrast, Li Chenyang (2006) is clear on the aim of his paper. His ideas are organized in clearly labelled paragraphs with a clear indication of what the preceding paragraphs aim to

²¹ Chenyang Li, 'The Confucian Ideal of Harmony'. *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 4 (2006), pp. 592-593.

achieve. This provides a logical structure that the reader can easily follow. Li defines technical jargon and makes use of Chinese characters, capturing meanings that translation might miss. Although his sentences are long, the jargon is minimal with both classical and relatable modern examples used to explain his arguments. This is useful in engaging with a non-technical audience. Unlike Addey, Li introduces other traditions such as Christianity which suggests a more balanced approach.

Addey's (2020) theoretical framework is grounded in philosophy, with the assumption that Neoplatonism is best understood as a way of life than just a set of ideas as evidenced by her emphasis on metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, ethics, ritual and soteriology. She draws primarily on early Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, grounding their ideas as authoritative texts with reference made to late Neoplatonists, and modern scholar Stephen Clark to further support her ideas²². She prioritises harmony, cosmology and metaphysics as the basis of her ideas. On the other hand, Li (2006) adopts a philosophical approach grounded in the assumption that Confucian ideal of harmony can be effectively applied in interpersonal relationships and politics. He provides an evidence based analysis to solidify his claims. He draws primarily on classical Confucian texts such as Zhongyong and the Mencius. Both papers are constructive in not just describing how each tradition views harmony but how we can apply the ideas in real-life situations. Addey (2020) suggests spiritual practices to dance to the tune of the gods and Li (2006) suggests

²² Crystal Addey, 'The Connected Cosmos: Harmony, Cosmology and Theurgy in Neoplatonism', in Nicholas Campion, ed., *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a Practical Philosophy for a Sustainable Future*. (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), PDF p. 26.

instrumentalizing strife to achieve harmony. Their arguments are well presented and evidence based.

Addey's (2020) paper gives a well-articulated overview of Neoplatonism from rich sources with clear integration of metaphysics, ritual and soteriology and shows relevance to ecological and spiritual concerns. However, some of the weaknesses to note are that she jumps from one point to another without explaining to the reader what to expect in the next paragraph, with limited counter arguments. However, she is persuasive in establishing that harmony is central to Neoplatonism which offers a way of reintegrating the human soul to the cosmos.

Li's (2006) paper is clearly organised with a thesis explicitly stated, with an extensive use of modern and classical examples combined with engagement with other traditions and practical applications of Confucianism to everyday life. However, his texts could engage more with Confucian critics. Li's (2006) text is highly persuasive because he makes an evidence based compelling case on the application of Confucianism in conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Both Crystal Addey (2020) and Li Chenyang (2006) make valuable contributions to understanding harmony through the lens of different philosophical traditions. For Addey (2020), concept of harmony is central to Neoplatonic cosmology, metaphysics, Theurgy and soteriology. The task of the theurgist through spiritual practices is to establish relationship, assimilation and alignment to the harmony of the world and the gods. For Li (2006), the Confucian ideal of harmony is a crucial element in conflict resolution through rejecting sameness and embracing diversity.

Although Addey's (2020) paper is difficult to navigate due to the dense prose it provides deep insight into the Neoplatonic idea of harmony. Li's (2006) paper is more accessible and easier to follow with strong persuasive arguments. Ultimately both papers succeed in their intentions

and demonstrate that harmony is a valuable resource whether in achieving alignment with the cosmos or resolving conflict in a harmonious way.

References

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