Considering, Questioning and Reimagining Harmony

Multicultural, Multihistorical and Multidisciplinary Reflections

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Real Harmony of the Self: Enactivism and the Kyoto School

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Harmony is a widely cherished idea in everyday thinking. We think that life in harmony is more desirable than life in disharmony. We believe that it is an ideal state we should all aspire to realize. However, there is no settled agreement in the philosophical literature as to how to understand the concept. What is harmony? What are the requirements for there to be harmony? If we can talk about *inner harmony* within the self and *outer harmony* between the self and the world, what is the relation between them? Does one precede the other? Are they independent effects that can happen separately? Or are they deeply intertwined only to be two aspects of a single phenomenon?

The aim of this chapter is to consider these fundamental questions regarding harmony by drawing on two intellectual resources, which are hitherto ignored in philosophical discussions on this topic – that is, enactivism and the Kyoto School tradition. In the following, we shall articulate the affinity between these two resources, how they might both benefit from a comparative analysis, and what they jointly imply for the concept of harmony.

I. HARMONY AS AUTONOMY: AN ENACTIVE ANALYSIS

Most generally, harmony is a relation between multiple distinct elements. But more specifically, what kind of relation is it? We shall take Li and Düring's proposal as our starting point, which holds that harmony consists in 'the bringing together of dissimilar elements in a manner that coordinates these as parts of an organic whole' (2022a: 1). On this view, harmony is an expression of 'the generative and transformative quality of life itself' (2022b: 39). But then what

does it mean to say that elements are brought together to make an *organic whole*? In this section, we will attempt a deeper analysis of this notion by drawing on conceptual resources from enactivist philosophy of life and mind.

I.1 *Autonomy: Operational Closure, Precariousness and Agency*

Enactivism is an intellectual movement that originates in the seminal work by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (2017). It was originally presented as an alternative to the cognitivist approach in the cognitive sciences, which conceives of the human mind as a computational system that produces intelligent behaviour by generating internal representations of the external world. By contrast, enactivism conceptualizes cognition as embodied activity which living organisms engage with to adapt to the environment. In this view, there is no strict distinction between cognitive and life-sustaining organic processes, or as Thompson puts it, 'mind is life-like and life is mind-like' (2007: 128). Accordingly, a scientific understanding of the mind requires a scientific understanding of life.

The enactivist account of life offers a useful conceptual resource to clarify the nature of harmony understood as the bringing together of different elements into an organic whole. For enactivists, the signature of life is *self-individuation*. That is, living organisms actively produce their self-identity as an individual through their ongoing interaction with the world. Furthermore, enactivists define self-individuating systems in terms of a specific kind of organization called *autonomy*. An autonomous system consists of an interrelated network of processes that are arranged in such a way as to continuously produce its self-identity – that is, said interrelated network of processes itself.

Not all autonomous systems are living systems. Autonomous systems can be instantiated at multiple levels, such as microbial communities, nervous systems, social systems and ecosystems. However, all living systems are autonomous systems. Living systems are autonomous systems that are instantiated in the biochemical domain. This important subcategory of autonomy is called 'autopoiesis', a neologism introduced by Varela himself and his mentor Umberto Maturana, which etymologically literally means 'self-production'. Following their work, enactivists hold that autopoiesis is the defining organizational feature of living systems (Maturana and Varela 1980, Thompson 2007).

A paradigm example of autopoiesis is single-cell organisms like bacteria. A bacterium's life depends upon a closed, interrelated network of biochemical processes. Metabolism is a case in point. To sustain its life, a bacterium needs to

take in substances from the environment and break them down into smaller units of matter, such as fatty acids and amino acids; it then synthesizes these into larger materials, such as protein and fat, which are then incorporated into its bodily structure, such as the cell membrane. Yet this bodily structure is not simply the final product of metabolism. For metabolism is made possible by the cell membrane that bounds off the interior of the organism from the external environment. In other words, if we visualize the biochemical processes involved in metabolism and the relations between them, starting from the process of taking in substances from the environment through the cell membrane up to the process of producing the cell membrane itself, they make up a closed network among themselves. Enactivists call this circular organization of processes 'operational closure' and consider it as the hallmark of autonomy in general and autopoiesis in particular.

Here, an important clarification is in order. When enactivists say that all living systems exhibit operational closure, they are not saying that all living systems are physically closed off from the external environment by a material membrane. Operational closure is a topological *organization* exhibited in certain networks of processes. Cell membranes might be seen as determining a closed biochemical domain within a spatial environment, but operational closure is a different matter from this kind of spatial closure. In fact, enactivists hold that operational closure in a living system is only made possible by its *structural coupling* with the environment. Cell membranes do not completely seal off the interior of the cell from the environment. They also serve as a selective interface that allows certain materials, but not others, to pass through in and out of the cell. Bacteria can maintain their operational closure precisely because of their concrete bodily structure that allows them to interact with the environment materially in this fashion. In other words, living systems involve a delicately poised balance between openness and closedness: their identity as a living system is defined by a topologically closed self-producing organization of processes (operational closure); but at the same time, this closed organization relies for its persistence on the living system's material and energetic openness to the environment at the level of embodied structure (structural coupling).

This delicate balance between openness and closedness is required because living systems are constantly under the threat of decay. They can persist only insofar as the processes involved in the operationally closed network continues to take place one after the other in a time-sensitive manner. Di Paolo and Thompson (2014) refers to this feature as the 'precariousness' of autonomous systems (72). In one sense, precariousness is the fundamental problem that

all living systems must continuously deal with. They can never stop their structure-level interaction with the environment precisely because the self-producing organization defining their identity is so precarious that otherwise they will disintegrate or die. In another sense, however, precariousness is not simply a problem to be solved. We cannot simply say that autonomous systems persist *despite* their precariousness because they could not exist at all without their struggle against precariousness in the first place. An operationally closed network of processes cannot keep cycling without the system's ongoing interaction with the environment at the level of its concrete embodiment. A perfectly robust system with no threat of decay would not so much be an immortal, autonomous system as a system that is not autonomous or alive at all. In short, precariousness is a constitutive condition of autonomy.

Accordingly, Di Paolo and Thompson (2014) state that an autonomous system 'is constructed on a double negation' (72). Processes embedded in operational closure each have a natural tendency to decay and thus to eventually negate the existence of the autonomous system. The autonomous system persists as these negative tendencies are further negated by their ongoing interaction with the other processes constituting the operational closure. In the case of living systems, this is realized by their ongoing material and energetic exchange with the environment at the level of their embodied structure. This is why autonomous systems in general and autopoietic systems in particular are 'inherently restless' (72). They need to make sure the processes are constantly in action to maintain their self-identity.

Finally, it is important to notice that, in living systems, the crucial balance between openness and closedness is not simply maintained by fortune. Living organisms have regulatory mechanisms that enable them to monitor and actively intervene in their relationship with the environment to reduce the possibility of falling apart. This is evident in animal behaviour. Animals usually don't simply sit and wait for food and water to enter their body, but actively explore the environment through sensorimotor activities to secure them. But basic single-cell organisms are also equipped with regulatory mechanisms, such as the mechanism to control the opening and closing of ion channels of their cell membranes that allow them to regulate the chemical condition inside the cell. Di Paolo (2005) terms this capacity as 'adaptivity' and identifies it as a necessary feature of living systems besides autopoiesis. Living organisms do not simply *undergo* autonomy or autopoiesis. Rather, they continually *accomplish* it actively based on their adaptivity. As we shall discuss below, this view on the nature of organisms has interesting implications for how we understand the nature of harmony.

I.2 *Biological and Sensorimotor Autonomy*

Enactivists argue that human cognition is on a continuum with basic life-sustaining activities of simple living organisms. Yet obviously, not all human cognitive behaviour can be explained in terms of embodied processes to maintain an agent's individuality as a biological organism. For example, every morning, you might start your day by brewing a cup of coffee. You might value this as a necessary routine to start your day, but it is unnecessary for your survival as a biological organism. Human cognition and behaviour is vastly underdetermined by the basic self-individuating activity of autonomous systems.

However, according to enactivism, autonomy is realized at multiple levels. Simple organisms like bacteria exhibit *biological autonomy*, a level of autonomy characteristic of operationally closed networks that constitute individual systems spatially bounded by a semipermeable membrane in the biochemical domain. More complex organisms with neural systems exhibit *sensorimotor autonomy*, a level of autonomy found in operationally closed networks of sensorimotor schemes that generate adaptive behaviour (Di Paolo et al. 2017, Barandiaran 2018). *Sensorimotor schemes* consist of organized patterns of behaviours, supported by neural, bodily and environmental structures. These patterns are shaped through an organism's history of interaction with the world.

We can think of them as interrelated networks of *habits* that characterize the highly organized ways in which we ordinarily navigate the world (Miyahara and Robertson 2020). Just like how the network of processes constitutive of biologically autonomous systems are precarious and self-sustaining, as we saw above, habitual organizations of behaviours are precarious and self-sustaining as 'the elements that support it (muscular dispositions, neural connectivity patterns, spatial arrangement of objects and tools, etc.) depend for their structural stability on the exercise of the scheme' (Di Paolo et al. 2017: 144). Accordingly, enactivists distinguish between biological and sensorimotor forms of autonomy. While simple organisms actively produce their biological identity, complex organisms actively produce their *sensorimotor identity* through their ongoing interaction with the world.

Notice that the thought that we actively constitute our identity by cultivating habitual patterns of behaviours through ongoing interactions with the environment is not original to enactivism. It has long been recognized in the history of philosophy that the self develops through an agent's history of interaction with the world. For example, Aristotle famously contends that moral characters develop out of habits. Moral characters, such as courage and moderation, dispose us to act morally across

various situations according to specific situational demands. In this sense, they are the basis of moral actions. Developmentally, however, moral character does not precede moral action. Rather, according to Aristotle, we cultivate moral character by first doing things aligned with it. For example, he writes, 'we become fair and honest by doing things that are fair and honest, moderate people by doing things that are moderate, and brave people by doing brave things' (*Nichomachean Ethics* II.1, 1103b). To put it in enactivist terminology, moral cultivation is a process where we actively produce our sensorimotor identity as a moral agent by repeatedly activating and hence reinforcing the sensorimotor schemes constitutive of said identity.

According to enactivism, therefore, autonomous self-individuation is a dynamic organization that runs across biological and sensorimotor life. Simple organisms actively produce their self-identity as a biological agent through biochemical processes brought together to function as an organized whole (biological autonomy). Complex organisms with a neural system actively produce their self-identity as a sensorimotor agent by exercising sensorimotor schemes (or habitual patterns of behaviours) brought together to produce organized interactions with the world (sensorimotor autonomy). In each case, a precarious self-identity is actively generated through the restless working of an operationally closed network of multiple processes.

I.3 *Enactive Harmony as Autonomy*

Some authors suggest that things are in harmony when they are brought together to form an organic whole (Li and Düring 2022: 1). But what does it mean for multiple elements to come together to make an organic whole? According to the enactivist view, an organic whole is defined by its autonomous organization. That is to say, organic wholes are self-organizing systems that individuate themselves from the rest of the world through their ongoing active engagement with this very world. This suggests an answer to the question which specific kind of relation harmony is – namely, a dynamic organization between processes that jointly form an operationally closed network under a constant threat of decay.

This conception of harmony allows us to clarify its difference from similar concepts such as resonance and synchrony (Lomas et al. 2022). We might ordinarily think that synchrony entails harmony. For example, mass games consist of synchronized movements across multiple bodies, and we might consider them as exhibiting both synchrony and harmony. However, mass games are not self-individuating. They consist of multiple bodily processes, but they do not form operationally closed networks insofar as each performer produces

their movement individually according to a fixed choreography. The mass may *appear* as an organic whole (or an autonomous system) to an external observer, but it is not insofar as it is organized according to a plan constructed outside and then imposed on the system. From the enactivist perspective, therefore, the relevant processes are in synchrony but not in harmony.

This is not to say that synchrony is incompatible with harmony. Consider a flock of birds, which often consists of multiple bodies generating synchronous movements. In this case, the synchrony is self-organized. It is not pre-designed by an external agent, but rather it emerges endogenously from within the network of interactions between the movements. Each process making up the system is enabled by other processes jointly making it up. In this case, the flock is a self-individuating, autonomous system. The birds are both in synchrony and harmony.

Another implication concerns the relation between harmony and disharmony. We might think of *perfect harmony* as an ideal state where everything is so well aligned that there is no disharmony involved. For example, we might think of perfect inner harmony as a state in which all our beliefs, desires, and emotions are perfectly consistent with each other such that we are completely devoid of internal tensions, concerns or frustrations. From the enactivist perspective, however, perfect harmony of this kind is not simply hard to achieve, but rather is conceptually incoherent. Autonomous systems are constitutively precarious. They are always in decay, and this is not simply a matter of fact. Autonomous systems continue to actively individuate themselves precisely by fighting against the threat of falling apart. From the enactivist perspective, therefore, harmony is possible precisely because there is a constant threat of disharmony. When the latter is completely removed, we soon lose the former as well.

This also implies that harmony is a dynamic relation. Autonomous systems must constantly interact with the environment to retain their self-identity against the threat of decay. Self-individuation is an ongoing accomplishment, a process that is never complete once and for all. In ordinary parlance, we talk about how certain pairs of colours are harmonious when they are aesthetically pleasing when used together. From the enactivist perspective, however, harmony is not found in a static collection of elements like this. Harmony is a dynamic organization that holds between processes brought together to constitute a closed network among themselves. This closed system, however, can persist only insofar as it is open to external perturbations. Harmony is not achievable within the bounds of the self-identical system.

Finally, according to the enactivist perspective, if harmony is realized by bringing about an autonomous system, self-identity always entails harmony at some level. If you are alive, those processes constitutive of your biological identity are in harmony. If you have a patterned way of life, the sensorimotor schemes constitutive of your sensorimotor identity are in harmony. But we should also note that these are not what we ordinarily mean by talking about harmony as an ideal. When we aspire for harmony, we are usually not talking about our hope to stay alive or maintain an established pattern of life. A crucial question then is whether this notion of harmony as autonomy applies to the idea of harmony operative at a more personal level of self and self-identity. In the next section, we will outline an affirmative answer to this question by drawing on modern Japanese philosopher Ueda Shizuteru's account of self and self-awareness.

II. HARMONY AS A HIGHER-ORDER AUTONOMY: UEDA SHIZUTERU'S ACCOUNT

Ueda Shizuteru (1926–2019) belongs to the Kyoto School tradition which was founded by Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kyoto School tradition refers to a group of thinkers that developed original philosophies by drawing from two very different bodies of ideas: the spiritual and intellectual traditions of East Asia (most notably Zen Buddhism) and the Western philosophical tradition. Such an attempt was unprecedented and naturally so because of the seemingly irreconcilable nature of the two traditions. Generally speaking, East Asian traditions, specifically Zen Buddhism, value non-thinking and non-reflective direct experience. Western philosophical traditions, on the other hand, emphasize reflection and argumentation based on logical analysis.

Nishida Kitaro, the unintended founder of the school, took up the challenge and paved the way by seeking 'true reality' beyond the subject–object duality and clarifying how all our knowledge of reality arises from such a basis. He introduced several important terms, such as 'pure experience', *jikaku* (自覚 'self-awareness') and *basho* (場所 'place'), that were subsequently taken up by his followers, including Ueda Shizuteru, who belongs to the third-generation Kyoto School philosophers. In the following sub-sections, we will look at Ueda's notion of the true self and *jikaku*, the dynamic movement of self-awareness. We will see how Ueda's notion of the true self can be understood as a higher-order habitual

identity where one's self-identity is not determined by various habitual patterns but is maintained by the constant reappraisal of its own habits.

II.1 *Ueda's Account of the Self and Jikaku*

Ueda characterizes the self as 'fundamentally at unrest and problematic' (2002: 149).[2] It is at unrest because the self is constantly in movement, and it is problematic because this movement is not always a smooth movement. So, what exactly is the nature of this movement? To start with, the self for Ueda is fundamentally disclosed to its surrounding world. Yet, if it were always open – just as a door that is always open wouldn't do the job of separating what is inside from what is outside – the self would not be distinct from its environment. Ueda accordingly characterizes the self as a dynamic interplay of the two movements of 'opening up' and 'closing in'. As he says, 'The subject is not a substance, but a movement from the self to the self – this is essentially what the self is' (150). This phrase, 'from the self to the self' (自己から自己へ), recurs throughout Ueda's discussion on the self.

In the movement of going out 'from the self', the self is disclosed to its environment or *basho* (meaning 'place' in Japanese), to use the preferred term he takes from Nishida Kitaro. *Basho* refers not so much to the physical environment as to the space of meaning, such as the cultural, social, historical setting one finds oneself in. In the reverse movement of coming back 'to the self', the self returns to itself with a renewed understanding of itself upon its encounter with the people and things in the *basho*. Therefore, the nature of the self cannot be captured by a simple reflexive, 'I am I' or 'the self is the self'. Such characterizations fail to take account of the movement of going out of itself and opening up to its environment. Ueda (2002) accordingly formulates the dynamic interplay of opening up and closing in as follows: 'the self is, selflessly, the self' (我は、我なくして、我である) (151). The self selflessly goes out of itself and comes back to itself. This whole movement is what the self is.

In order to fully appreciate Ueda's understanding of the self, it is important to understand its Buddhist undertones, which we can see in the notion of selflessness he employs. As we will see in more detail in the next section, one of the main problems of the self that Ueda underlines is its tendency to close up within itself. This is a problem Buddhism takes up very seriously, for the self to begin with is, in Buddhism, an ego. When the self says, 'I am I', this is the ego's attempt to establish its self-identity by narcissistically holding onto its self-image. In the Buddhist teachings, the self's egoistic character is identified as the 'three

poisons', namely greed, aversion and delusion. Greed refers to our selfishness and desire to satisfy the ego through possession, whether it is through physical possession or by ownership of different labels, saying 'I am this and that'. Aversion refers to the anger towards other people who are, first and foremost, rivals fighting over the possession of things. Finally, delusion refers to ignorance towards reality and misperception of the self as being separate from everything else. As Ueda (2000: 43) rightly notes, however, the Buddhist teachings are not saying that the three poisons are what characterizes who we are in truth. On the contrary, they are the roots of suffering that must be overcome in order to become liberated from suffering. This is why, in order to counteract the ego's tendencies, Buddhism emphasizes 'no self'. Ueda's formulation of the self as 'the self is selflessly the self' incorporates this Buddhist insight by inserting the moment of self-negation ('selflessly') to cut through the ego's tendency to establish a self-contained self-identity.

It is also important to note that Ueda's formulation of the self is in fact a variation of Nishida's famous formulation of the structure of *jikaku* or self-awareness: 'the self sees [or reflects, mirrors] itself within the self' (自己は自己に於いて自己を見る) (e.g. 1965: 387).[3] Before we take a further look into this, let us first note the specific meaning of the word *jikaku*. While it is often translated as 'self-awareness' or 'self-consciousness', such translations do not quite capture the connotation the word carries in Japanese. *Jikaku* (自覚) is a word used in ordinary speech and is comprised of two sinographs, *ji* (自, 'self') and *kaku* (覚, 'enlightenment' or 'awakening'). As the meanings of these sinographs indicate, the word is originally a Buddhist term meaning 'self-awakening' or 'self-realization'.

When Japanese people use the word today, the religious connotation is lost but it still carries the sense of becoming aware of one's sense of self. More specifically, *jikaku* refers to the understanding of one's self *in the place one finds oneself*. For example, I may say, 'I am gradually gaining *jikaku* as a mother', which basically means that the person is gradually becoming aware of their role as a mother. Here, '*jikaku* as a mother' refers to the self-understanding of oneself as a mother. But such self-understanding cannot be achieved by learning about what it means to be a mother from reading books on being a mother and simply applying that knowledge to oneself. Instead, it involves a process of adapting to one's new self-identity brought about by the completely new life of taking care of one's own child. Often, we are not aware of the change in one's identity when we are busy adapting to a new life. We just respond to the demands made on us without stopping to reflect on who we have become. The *jikaku* may only start to

arise when, for example, you talk to a friend and start referring to your child as 'my child', 'my daughter' or 'my son', or when someone refers to you as the child's mother.

This is to say, the kind of self-understanding that accompanies *jikaku* involves being open to one's surrounding social and cultural environment and engaging with others around us. This also means that *jikaku* is not something that takes place within the bounds of one's mind but is necessarily embodied. While it certainly involves a reflective component of distancing from the situation and ourselves (as in the case of when you refer to your child as 'my child' and see yourself as the child's mother), it also involves comporting yourself in the world in a way that reflects one's self-understanding. This is why when a mother does something that is outside the norms of being a 'good mum', like leaving their child at home to party all night, people start to raise eyebrows and question whether the person really has *jikaku* as a mother. *Jikaku* in the true sense must be embodied in one's actions.

Let us now return to Nishida's original formulation of *jikaku*: 'the self reflects itself within the self'. Nishida himself does not discuss how this formulation relates to our ordinary way of speaking about *jikaku*. In fact, he introduces the notion in the context of grappling with a more abstract epistemological problem of seeking the foundation for our knowledge. But Ueda provides a helpful analysis that clarifies how *jikaku* as formulated by Nishida is not so foreign to the way the word is used in ordinary speech and how it is also different from simply saying, 'the self is the self'.

When we say, 'I am I' or 'the self is the self', we are objectifying the self and saying that I am this self (the objectified self). So I may say, 'I am a teacher', but in doing so, I may just be putting a label, 'teacher', on me, which is logically no different from when we say about someone else, 'He is a teacher'. I have merely told you what my profession is but the kind of self-understanding that is involved here is not of the same sort that accompanies *jikaku*. Ueda tells us that in order to have *jikaku* as a teacher, it is not enough that I am making the judgment about myself, namely that 'I am a teacher', but this must be evident *to me* (2003: 86–7). In other words, this self-understanding must be clearly reflected *in me*. Nishida's formulation of *jikaku*, 'the self reflects itself within the self', captures this very point. Self-awareness in the sense of *jikaku* involves the self (as subject) understanding itself (as object) *within the self* (as place). Without the latter, 'within the self', our understanding of the self would be no different from understanding objects. In this way, just as our ordinary usage of *jikaku* already connotes our embeddedness and openness to the place one finds oneself in,

Nishida's notion of *jikaku* also highlights how one's self-understanding is necessarily 'implaced'. And this is why *jikaku* and *basho* are co-implicated terms in Nishida's philosophy.

But when Nishida formulates *jikaku* in this way, namely in saying that self-understanding must take place 'within the self', there is a danger of understanding self-awareness as taking place within an already existing, self-contained self (or place). In truth, however, it is the opposite. As Ueda clarifies, '"Within the self" means "being open to the place the self finds itself in"' (2003: 87). To say that the self-understanding of 'I am a teacher' is clearly reflected *in me* or 'within the self' is to say that I understand myself as a teacher to my students and interact with them as their teacher in the classroom. This would not be possible if I were closed off from the students and the school. Instead, such self-understanding is premised on my being open to the place (the classroom, school) and the interactions with the people in that place. As I open myself further and my self-understanding deepens, I may even come to the understanding that my role as a teacher extends beyond the classroom, well into the future of the students' lives as I influence their ways of thinking, values and characters. This would involve my opening up to a different kind of place, namely not just to the classroom and school where teachers and students have their unique responsibilities, but to a more personal place where the interactions are not limited to those specific responsibilities but concern the person as a whole. 'Being open to the place one finds oneself in' not only entails being open to multiple places but also allows for going deeper into the various layers of meaning each place may bear.

However, as we saw earlier, given the ego's tendencies to close up, it is not always easy to open ourselves up to the place we find ourselves in. Even when we think we are open, we are often only seemingly opening up in an attempt to maintain that self-contained self-identity, 'I am I'. Ueda's reformulation of *jikaku* as 'the self is selflessly the self' reflects his emphasis on the importance of self-negation for the self-affirmation of the self. In this way, we can say that his reformulation effectively highlights the dynamic movement of the self more than Nishida did. The self is not a 'thing' or substance, but is *jikaku*'s dynamic process of self-understanding.

II.2 *The 'Problems' of the Self*

While Ueda formalized the self as the dynamic movement of going out and coming back to itself, he also acknowledged that this movement is not always

actualized. In fact, most of the time, it is *not* actualized. This is why the self is said to be 'at unrest and problematic'. Ueda identifies three ways in which the movement can stagnate.

The first is when the self cannot go out of itself. He calls this 'self-attachment' (自己固執). This is when the self-negation ('selflessly') drops off and the self gets trapped in its own little ego. As we saw above, the Buddhists took note of this phenomena very closely. The self neglects its disclosedness to the environment and others, and thinks of itself as self-contained and separate from everything else, thinking, 'I am I'. While this may seem like an extreme case of ego-centrism, it is in fact a state most of us are familiar with. For example, when we are discussing with others about some topic, how often are we really listening to what the others are saying? Is it not the case that we often find ourselves lost in our own thoughts or hearing what we want to hear instead of letting the other speak for themselves? This is a form of self-attachment insofar as we are not really leaving our egos behind when we face the other person. Ueda notes on the ubiquitous nature of self-attachment and takes this to be the default mode of the self that we assume (2002: 156).

The second is a state of 'self-loss' (自己喪失), which occurs when the self cannot come back to itself after selflessly opening up to the environment and others. While perhaps less common than the first, this can occur when one loses oneself among others and cannot find one's own voice. For example, moving to a new country and completely immersing oneself in the new culture can sometimes result in a sense of a loss of the self. As difficult as it may be to suspend one's own perspective to submit oneself to another, it is not such an easy matter to come back to the self and find one's own ground after being disclosed and exposed to an alien world. Another example is where one quite literally loses oneself in love and devotion to a significant other to the point where their sense of self, with their own values and ideas, are lost. While this may be fine while the relationship lasts, when it is lost, they realize that their sense of self is also lost with it.

The third is when the movement of going out and coming back is still at work, but only seemingly so. That is, instead of going out of self, the movement occurs within the bounds of the self and gets tangled up with itself as a consequence. Ueda (2002: 158) calls this 'discontent' (わだかまり). An example of this is when one holds onto an image of oneself and attempts to reinforce the self-image through one's encounters with other people. As a consequence, one gets caught up by the self-image, or the image grasps one, and one suffers from the gap between it and one's real self.

As these descriptions suggest, these are real, existential problems or, as Ueda (2002: 159) puts it, 'existential illnesses' (実存の病). Given that they concern the very existence of the individual, the ways in which these problems manifest vary depending on the individual and on the situation. Nonetheless, Ueda tells us that the 'cure' to these problems is one and the same: the recovery of the dynamic movement of the self, of going out the self and returning to the self.

II.3 *Ueda's Conception of the Harmony of the Self*

How to recover this dynamic movement is a real problem. We will come back to this shortly. For now, let us address the pressing question: what does this account of the self have to say about the harmony of the self? Ueda in fact does not explicitly speak of the harmony of the self. But what is clear is that Ueda's account of the self emphasizes how the self is constantly at unrest and is almost always in some kind of a problematic state. This suggests that, for the most part, the self is far from being in harmony with itself – that is, at least if one sees it through the lens of 'perfect harmony', a frictionless state in which every element is perfectly aligned with each other. Instead, it assumes a *disharmonious* state as its default mode of being. Whether it is self-attachment, self-loss or discontent, the self is in 'disharmony' in the sense that it is suffering from its own predicament.

The only way such a disharmonious state can be resolved is by recovering its original dynamic movement. But then this implies that the harmony of the self is not a static state one strives to gain or regain, but rather refers to the self *in its dynamic movement of going out and coming back to itself.* The important point here is that both movements of going out (opening up) and coming back (closing in) are active and that this is mediated by a moment of self-negation where the self negates its ego's tendencies and discloses itself to its place. Harmony of the self, then, is not achievable within the bounds of the self. Moreover, this 'disclosedness' is not a matter of all or nothing. Most of the time, we are neither completely closed nor completely open, but 'half open, half closed' (2000: 39). In other words, we are usually somewhere in between self-attachment and loss of the self. Therefore, we could say that the self is in harmony so long as it avoids the two pitfalls of either being completely closed or completely open. This would entail that harmony of the self is not something we actively attempt to bring about, but is rather a temporary state we find ourselves in when we have fortuitously avoided falling into the two extremes.

However, Ueda's account seems to suggest a more positive, higher sense of a harmonious self. This relates to his notions of the 'true self' (真の自己).

According to Ueda (2001: 286), the 'true self' is the 'unity (相即) of the freedom from the self and the freedom to the self' (自己からの自由と自己への自由). The key word here is 'freedom'. The true self has the freedom to go out from the self and to come back to the self. But what exactly does it mean to say that one has this freedom? How does having this freedom differ from our usual self? In the following, we attempt to clarify the nature of this freedom by interpreting it as a higher-order habitual autonomy.

II.4 *The 'True Self' as a Higher-Order Habitual Identity*

In the previous section, we saw that complex organisms such as human agents exhibit a different kind of autonomy from the biological one shared with more simple organisms. Through sensorimotor schemes, human beings can develop habits and form a sensorimotor autonomy. But humans can also take a distance from the various acquired habits by reflecting on and reassessing them in light of new situations and values. In other words, sensorimotor identity allows for the formation of new habits based on the agent's reflective capacity. Moreover, not only can one form and reform habits of the self, but one could also acquire a higher-order habit that makes self-reflection one's habit.

While such a habit may entail looking inwards and becoming more introspective, one could also become more reflective by becoming more 'self-aware' in the sense of *jikaku*. The latter would involve becoming less self-absorbed and more attuned to one's situation and environment. As we saw above, humans have a tendency to close up and get attached to their egos. This is to say, habitual patterns get sedimented and, especially as we grow older, we become more comfortable identifying them with who we are and less open to changing them. Cultivating the habit of *jikaku* would entail counteracting this natural tendency (a natural habit, one could say) and actively going out of the self by opening oneself up to one's surroundings. As we observe in the Buddhist teachings, this is no easy matter given the force of this natural tendency. It requires a committed practice of diligently working with the self; taking note of the various behavioural patterns, both natural (based on the biological needs) and acquired (based on one's beliefs and values), identifying any 'bad habits' that reinforce a fixed sense of self, and loosening one's grip on some of those habits. Such a practice is not just about training the mind or changing one's mindset, but is essentially psychosomatic since much of our habits involve the way we use our bodies. The Zen Buddhist practice of *zazen*, for example, involves 'just sitting' and emptying one's mind. Anyone who has tried *zazen* meditation would know that simply sitting is not so

simple and requires much diligence and discipline. Our natural tendency is to move around as with our mind, constantly wandering around and getting carried away in our thoughts. This is why meditation practices traditionally have a strict scheme that focuses on attending to and undoing those sedimented habits.

But as we saw earlier, *jikaku* is not just about letting go of the ego and opening up to one's surroundings. It also involves understanding the self in light of the place one finds oneself in. To put it in Ueda's terms, it is not only about going out of the self, but is equally about coming back to the self. By going out of the self and disclosing oneself to the various places it finds itself in, it can come back to itself with a renewed understanding of itself and its relation to the places it belongs to. And this is also an important practice since otherwise one may risk falling into a state of self-loss. Cultivating the higher-order habit of *jikaku*, then, is to actively engage in the practice of loosening one's grip on one's 'bad habits' by going out of the self and coming back with a better understanding of the self as it relates to its surrounding world.

Returning to Ueda's notion of the true self as having the freedom to go out 'from the self' and to come back 'to the self', we can now say that the true self is the self that has acquired the higher-order habit of *jikaku*. Unlike the ordinary self that is determined by its sensorimotor identity in the sense that the various habits together form the identity of the self, the true self enjoys the freedom from it. This is not to say that the true self has no habitual patterns, but they do not define the self in the sense that it is able to take a distance from them by continuously subjecting them to evaluation in light of the various places one finds oneself in. Such a distance is achieved by actively opening oneself up to one's surrounding environment, which in turn allows the self to better understand itself. The 'freedom' of the true self, then, is nothing other than the higher-order habitual autonomy achieved through the continuous practice of the dynamic movement of *jikaku*, namely of going out of the self and coming back. The identity of the true self is not a fixed identity (a sedimentation of habits), one that says 'I am I', but is found in the very dynamic movement of *jikaku* where one's self-identity is continuously being shaped and reshaped in light of the various places one finds oneself in.[4]

In contrast to the state of harmony where one finds oneself fortuitously avoiding the two extremes of being completely closed and completely open, we can say that the harmony of the true self is an active achievement made on the part of the agent.[5] The true self continuously works on maintaining the dynamic movement of *jikaku* by actively opening itself up and returning to itself. And importantly, even for the true self, the disharmonious states, namely self-

attachment, self-loss and discontent, are not completely overcome in the sense that they disappear. The true self is not free from the precariousness of the self, but is less perturbed by its own precarious nature because it enjoys the freedom from identification, namely from identifying itself with its own natural tendencies and acquired habits. Moreover, it is only through its constant struggle against the threat of disharmony that one achieves its true self. Disharmony is not simply a problem to eliminate, but in fact a necessary scaffolding to achieve this authentic mode of being. Therefore, the true self enjoys a stability of the mind amid this dynamic movement. In Ueda's light, this is precisely what it means for a self to be truly in harmony with itself.

III. REAL HARMONY

To conclude this chapter, let us return to the questions we raised at the beginning: What is harmony? What are the requirements for there to be harmony? What is the relation between *inner harmony* that obtains within the self and *outer harmony* that holds between the self and the world?

To answer these questions, we took an organic approach that sees harmony as an expression of the generative power of life as our starting point. Drawing on the enactivist philosophy of life and mind, we then defined harmony as a dynamic organization characteristic of self-individuating, autonomous systems. This further means that harmony is not so much a fortuitous state that agents happen to undergo when they are lucky as an accomplishment that requires a delicate balancing act between openness and closedness in relation to the environment to persist over time.

We can conclude based on this account that inner and outer harmony are not two separate matters. If living systems rely constitutively upon a delicate balance between openness and closedness, we cannot think of them as first emerging as an internally harmonized closed system and then later 'parachuted into a pre-given world' (Varela et al. 2017: 135) to seek outer harmony with it. Rather, the enactivist view indicates that living systems bring about inner harmony as a closed system, as they become structurally coupled with the external environment. Moreover, this same dynamic organization applies both at the level of basic biological self-identity and the more complicated level of sensorimotor identity.

Similarly, for Ueda, harmony of the true self is actively achieved by opening up to the place it finds itself in and returning to itself by closing back in. This means that inner harmony is not achievable within the bounds of the self, but

rather, the self's interactions with the surrounding environment is a necessary condition for achieving inner harmony. It also means that when the true self is in harmony with itself, it is also, by the same token, in harmony with others and the world. For the self to be in harmony with itself, it must find a delicate balance, navigating the two extremes of being too open and too closed to others and the environment. Taken together, enactivism and Ueda point to a common dynamic that applies equally to biological, sensorimotor and personal levels of self-identity: It is not as if inner harmony must first be achieved for there to be outer harmony, or the other way around. Rather, they are co-implicative such that one would not exist without the other.

Another point worth highlighting is that, according to the conception of harmony we advanced in this chapter, disharmony is not antithetical to harmony but is constitutive of it. Enactivists identify 'precariousness' as a constitutive feature of living systems. It is tempting to conceive of harmony at the level of the biological self as a state in which it is perfectly devoid of threats to their existence. In reality, however, living systems can maintain their self-identity only through their ongoing struggle against the threat of decay built into their embodied structure. Harmony of the biological and sensorimotor self constitutively depends on the presence of elements of disharmony within itself and in its relationship with the environment. Similarly, according to Ueda, the self at the personal level constantly involves an element of disharmony. In his context, disharmonious states of the self refer to the loss of balance between the two dynamic movements of the self, namely openness and closedness. This loss of balance, which constantly threatens the self, typically results in either self-attachment, self-loss or discontent. In Ueda's view, such a loss of balance is not something that the self can get rid of, but is precisely what drives the self to actively achieve and maintain the dynamic movement and fine balance of opening up and closing in. In sum, enactivism and Ueda both advance an anti-perfectionist conception of harmony that envisions harmony and disharmony as two complementary dimensions of a single dynamic phenomenon, jointly suggesting its general applicability to different levels of the self.[6]

This concept of harmony is quite far from what people typically have in mind when they speak of harmony, namely the 'perfect harmony' where everything is aligned, leaving no room for disharmony. According to enactivism and Ueda, such a conception of harmony, at least in so far as life and the self is concerned, is unrealistic, not because it is too much of an ideal, but because that is simply not how self-individuating systems – systems that generate and maintain their self-identity endogenously through its own activities – work. If life were to

achieve such a perfect harmony, it would simply not be life anymore. What we have outlined above, then, can be said to be the *real* sense of harmony. Real harmony is not a perfect state free from disturbances to be reached once and for all. Life is not so forgiving. Real harmony refers to the delicate balancing of opening up and closing in, a balancing that requires continuous effort on the part of the agent.

NOTES

1 Both authors contributed equally to this chapter.
2 All quotes from Ueda have been translated from Japanese to English by Yuko Ishihara.
3 Nishida also uses the word *utsusu* (映す), which can be translated as 'reflects' or 'mirrors', in speaking of the self-reflecting or self-mirroring activity of the self/place (see, for example, 1965: 432).
4 For another kind of practice that attempts to cultivate the habit of *jikaku*, see Ishihara and Tainer 2024. The authors introduce the phenomenological method of 'epoché' (suspension of judgment) as a way to loosen our grip on our beliefs in order to let things speak for themselves (which they call 'playing with reality').
5 This overlaps with the distinction between *passive harmony* and *active harmony* sometimes associated respectively with Confucian and Daoist characterizations of harmony (Li and Düring 2021b: 24–5; also Chapter 9 in this volume).
6 The account presented here bears a striking similarity with the notion of Confucian harmony (Li and Düring 2021b) – which is not entirely surprising since we took these authors' organic approach as our starting point. However, it would be hasty to assume their complete overlap considering their different intellectual backgrounds. More research is needed to gain a more specific understanding of their similarities and differences.

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