

Diversity, Harmony (*he* 和), and the “Melting Pot”

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On Columbus Day in 1915, President Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech before a largely Irish-Catholic group belonging to the fraternal organization, the Knights of Columbus, at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The topic was the emergence of so-called “hyphenated Americanism.”

The phrase referred to Americans who had immigrated to the United States but who still identified with their own cultural backgrounds, e.g. those who might call themselves Irish-American, Mexican-American, or Chinese-American, meaning to retain some continuity with the former term. “There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism,” boomed Roosevelt. “There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.” This speech was delivered over a century ago, but it sounds like one that could be delivered by an American President today.

At issue is how American diversity works. Is “America” one thing or many things? How are its parts related to the whole? This piece will argue that John Dewey and William James have resources to address such questions. In what follows, these resources will be recalled and bolstered alongside the classical Chinese concept of harmony (*he* 和).

It might strike readers as odd that Chinese thought should be evoked in a discussion about American diversity. China is normally regarded as one of the most homogenous societies on

earth. Comparative philosophers David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, however, help to dispel what they call the “myth” of Han 漢 identity as a unifying factor in the Chinese experience. While it is unlikely that China will ever be the robustly multi-racial society that America is, it is not as homogenous as it might seem.

The Han people are indeed the principle ethnic group in China, comprising over 92% of the population. What remains are some fifty-odd minority ethnic groups. Despite this ethnic imbalance, however, several demographic forces—regional, cultural, linguistic, and economic—conspire to “create strains on the presumed harmony of the Han Chinese.”¹ Generated within this tension is a rather fervent need to define and retain “Chinese-ness” as a pervasive quality in the face of an inexorable and multi-scalar dynamism.

Such dynamism is a feature of most natural systems, and it is nothing new. For two and a half millennia, Chinese thinkers have been reflecting on how best to sustain order in the midst of such dynamism. The concept of harmony (*he*) is at the center of such reflections. Juxtaposing this ancient Chinese ideal with classical American thinking enables us to appreciate how the ideals that operate in each tradition are connected—and how such ideals offer an alternative to homogenization as a desirable social end.

America has a tendency to regard homogenization as a social end. Six years prior to delivering his “hyphenated Americanism” speech, Roosevelt was in Washington, D.C. for the city premier of Israel Zangwill’s play, *The Melting Pot* (1905). The play, which was dedicated to President Roosevelt, portrayed itself as “The Great American Drama,” an adaptation of *Romeo and*

¹ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 49.

Juliet set in contemporary New York City. David, an immigrant Russian Jew, falls in love with Vera, an immigrant Russian Christian. Together, they unite as Americans to overcome the Old World prejudices that challenge their love.

Naturally, they succeed. Watching as the setting sun gilds the (originally) copper flame of the torch on the Statue of Liberty, the protagonist declares: “It is the Fires of God around his Crucible! There she lays, the great Melting Pot—Listen! Can’t you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth, the harbor where a thousand mammoth feeders come from the ends of the world to pour in their human freight.” As David proclaims, “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming . . . God is making the American!”² David and Vera embrace as the curtain falls, and a burly Teddy Roosevelt could be seen protruding from his loge shouting to the playwright, “That’s a great play, Mr. Zangwill. That’s a great play!”³

Indeed, there is something beautiful and moving about Zangwill’s storyline. It reminds one that parochial differences between particular cultures can be overcome and deeper loyalties realized. Really—what is there not to like? Henceforth, the image of America as a “Melting Pot” would be used to represent to ourselves our social ideal.

Not, however, without some disturbing manifestations. The “Melting Pot,” for instance, became one of Henry Ford’s favorites ideas. Three years after Zangwill’s play premiered, Ford revolutionized American industry with the Ford Model T. Immigrants began flocking to Detroit for jobs on the assembly lines. The “Sociological Department” of the

Ford Motor Company was established in 1914 to facilitate their assimilation into American life. Through the “Ford English School,” immigrants learned to speak English and to practice “proper” American habits in areas such as food preparation, etiquette, hygiene, and manners.

Upon graduation from the Ford English School, a ceremony was held in which the students would wear costumes reflecting their native lands and, one-by-one, descend into an enormous stage-prop “Melting Pot,” only to emerge in Western suits waving little American flags. The “Melting Pot” idea thus fit hand-in-hand with industrialization in the United States. The Ford Motor Company were not only mass-producing automobiles, they were mass-producing “Americans.” Ford’s demographic proclivities as well as his racial and ethnic preferences did not go unnoticed on the world stage. He would be the only American deemed worthy of praise in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

John Dewey never liked the “Melting Pot” idea. “The theory of the Melting Pot always gave me rather a pang,” he remarked.⁴ It grated against his aesthetic sensibilities. The idea, however, had become central in American political discourse and Dewey had to contend with it.

In the years surrounding the First World War, questions about democracy and ethnicity loomed large in the United States, as did concerns about national loyalty. Dewey was critically engaged in these discussions. Having “lulled ourselves to sleep with the word ‘Melting-Pot,’” he observed, “we have now turned to the word ‘hyphenate’ as denoting the last thing in scares with a thrill.” Some were advocating compulsory military service as a means of forging a common national identity among disparate groups in the United States.

² Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot: Drama in Four Acts* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1932), 33, 184-185.

³ Guy Szuberla, “Zangwill’s The Melting Pot Plays Chicago,” *Melus* 20, no. 3 (1995), 3.

⁴ “The Principle of Nationality,” *Middle Works of John Dewey*, 10, 289, capitalization added.

Dewey rejected that idea. “My recognition of the need of agencies for creating a potent sense of a national ideal and of achieving habits which will make this sense a controlling power in action is not ungrudging,” Dewey allows. “But the primary question is what *is* the national ideal, and to what kind of national service does it stand related?” To use military training to foster a national identity among diverse groups would only “reduce them to an anonymous and drilled homogeneity,” he submits, “an amalgam whose uniformity would hardly go deeper than the uniforms of the soldiers.”⁵

The intelligent approach to the problem, according to Dewey, would be to address together the means-and-end of forging a national identity. As Dewey says, “We must ask what a real nationalism, a real Americanism, is like. For unless we know our own character and purpose we are not likely to be intelligent in our selection of the means to further them.”⁶ The first question to ask then is what is the *distinct character* of America as we find it?

It is not the “legalistic individualism” that informs our founding documents—for as Dewey reminds us, “[this] is not indigenous; it is borrowed from a foreign tradition.” Moreover, as the shortcomings of classical liberalism become increasingly apparent, “many of us are consciously weaned from it.” So again—*what is it that makes the American experience distinct?* “We need a new and more political Emerson,” suggests Dewey, to alert to us to our national character.⁷

* * *

America’s original seer here is Walt Whitman. As Americans, we turn to him to reconnect with our national spirit. 1855’s *Leaves of Grass* is a quintessentially “American” document. Instantly and almost unnervingly intimate, the poet cuddles up against the reader to recite a love song to the human race—a stream of unvarnished particulars, each human being a poem inside a poem. The teeming diversity of Whitman’s New York City is delivered unabridged. “I speak the password primeval . . . I give the sign of democracy,” he exclaims. “By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.”⁸

This is an elusive ideal, however, and even Whitman wavers.⁹ American diversity is a puzzle because it evokes the age-old problems of “Whole/Part” and “One/Many.” As a poem, America embraces the entirety of the human race: “I am large . . . I contain multitudes.”¹⁰

⁸ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2007), 39.

⁹ While Whitman the poet sang the song of America, Whitman the man had mixed feelings about New York City’s swelling immigrant populations. Between 1845–1855, three million foreigners came to American shores. Culturally speaking, the American ethos was never exactly “pro-foreigner”—and Whitman was nothing if not an American. Responses to the cultural influx in Whitman’s day ranged from the jingoistic nativism of the “Know-Nothings” to the “outreach” of Tammany Hall, which leveraged welfare assistance to new arrivals to bolster its own voter rolls. In Whitman’s prose writings, his nativist sympathies come through, and he was not without his prejudices. However, “if he was a nativist,” biographer David Reynolds writes, “he was one with a difference.” As a poet, Whitman remained wholly beyond ethnic prejudice: “Pleased with the native and pleased with the foreign . . . pleased with the old, and pleased with the new.” As a person, however, he identified as someone born and raised in the United States. The resulting paradox is one that lies at the heart of the American experience. See: David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 98–99, 150–153.

¹⁰ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 67.

⁵ “Universal Service as Education,” *Middle Works of John Dewey*, 10, 183–185, 188, italics added.

⁶ “Nationalizing Education,” *Middle Works of John Dewey*, 10, 204.

⁷ “Universal Service as Education,” 188–189.

Among its multitudinous parts, however, each has its own character and biases in tension with its counterparts. Ideally, such an arrangement works. As one Whitman scholar understands it, “the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was a utopian document,” one in which cultural differences are preserved in the social landscape while also “dissolved by affirmation of the cross-fertilization” of its varied parts.¹¹

It is here, whereby unity is obtained, informed, and enhanced by cross-fertilization, that the Chinese ideal of harmony (*he*) speaks to our current situation and connects with American philosophy in important ways. In a recent study of the concept, Chenyang Li argues that “harmony” is a term that is both central to Chinese philosophy and one that is routinely misunderstood by commentators. As Li explains, the most prevalent error in both Western and Chinese scholarship is that harmony is understood as “presupposing a fixed grand scheme of things that pre-exists in the world to which humanity has to conform.”¹² In contrast to such a misunderstanding, Li argues that the ideal of harmony in Chinese thought is “deep” in nature; it is “without a pre-set order” and thus “opposed to the kind of harmony [e.g. the Pythagorean] seen as conforming to a pre-existing structure in the world.”¹³

In the early Chinese corpus, the concept is commonly understood through aesthetic analogies. It is often illustrated through its association with the culinary arts, particularly with making soup. As the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 explains:

Harmony (*he*) is similar to soup. Soup is made by adding various kinds of seasoning to water and then cooking fish and meat in it. One mixes them all together and adjusts

the flavor by adding whatever is deficient and reducing whatever is in excess. It is only by mixing together ingredients of different flavors that one is able to create a balanced, harmonized taste.¹⁴

Flavorful soup is constituted by the ratio of its raw ingredients. Its harmony is measured by the degree to which it succeeds in incorporating those ingredients in a good (*shan* 善) way.

Onion, for instance, is wonderful in soup; but one does not therefore add all the onion that one can find. That would disrupt the unique contributions of the other ingredients and result in disharmony. The most harmonious soup effectively showcases the unique quality (*zhi* 質) of the onion—it balances its flavor with other ingredients, thereby tempering its otherwise pungent and over-bearing taste. The norm of harmony (*he*) thus entails that there are “raw” elements in things that are ideally preserved and thus expressed in ways that temper their excesses and augment their values through cross-fertilization with other ingredients, thus rendering a thing’s native qualities communicable and appreciated.

One does not need to remain in the Warring States period to find illustrations of how harmony (*he*) works in a culinary context. One recent example of this ancient norm is the once popular (now legendary) Japanese television program, *Iron Chef*. Here, master chefs are challenged to prepare five dishes that showcase a single “theme” ingredient that is announced only at the time of taping. They have one hour to bring the uniqueness of this theme ingredient into harmony with whatever else is at hand, and they are judged in three categories: *taste*, *creativity*, and *presentation*.

¹¹ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 309.

¹² Chenyang Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* (New York: Routledge Press, 2014), 1.

¹³ Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony*, 23-34.

¹⁴ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1-5 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2000), vol. 5, 684.

In order to win, chefs must foreground the distinct quality of this ingredient in a variety of combinations.¹⁵ Just as Confucius is concerned with “bringing out what is aesthetically best (*mei* 美) in a person,”¹⁶ the Iron Chef needs to bring out what is aesthetically best in an ingredient. For Confucius, what is best in a person is brought out through social relations; for the Iron Chef, what is best in an ingredient is brought out through culinary relations. In each case, what is unique is rendered communicable and becomes value-added in a larger harmony. Soup and ritual-custom, then, each function to enable the expression, register the worth, and temper the idiosyncrasy/excess of their constituents. Each promotes the healthy expression of some rough quality (*zhi* 質), giving it outlet and rendering its palatable in some refined form (*wen* 文).

That such harmonies do not correspond to pre-ordained patterns is suggested in the “Ritual Instruments” (*Liqi* 禮器) chapter of the *Rituals*. Here, we are told that the unique taste of raw sugar and the unique texture of unpainted surfaces possess their raw qualities (*zhi*) prior to becoming ingredient in the aesthetic wholes that subsequently showcase those qualities. The same holds true, we are told, for the person who studies ritual-custom (*li* 禮). “What is sweet can be brought into harmony (*he*), and what is bare can be brought into vibrant color. Likewise, persons who are genuine and sincere

(*zhongxin* 忠信) are capable of becoming educated through ritual-custom (*li*).”¹⁷

Just as raw sweetness precedes the dish in which it is preserved and surface quality precedes the object that is fashioned upon it, what is most genuine in a person precedes and becomes ingredient in the harmonies that result from ritual forms—in other words, they *contribute* to the orders that eventually emerge. Facilitating such expression is what ritual-customs are intended to do. As Master You says in the Confucian *Analects*: “Achieving harmony (*he*) is the most important function of ritual-custom (*li*).”¹⁸

In the Chinese tradition, each harmony emerges directly from the constituents that succeed in making it up. Thus, with respect to wholes, it is not governed by any pre-determined order or super-ordinate pattern. With respect to parts, it is distinct from Aristotle’s concept of “just proportion” among constituents, which amounts to “equality of ratios” according to strictly mathematical measures in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁹ For Chinese thinkers, harmony has to do instead with “equity” (*gedeqisuo* 各得其所): “extending to each its proper due” given the circumstances that obtain and the results that follow.

This is a distinct approach, and Chenyang Li’s work is helpful in distinguishing the elemental decisions that go into sustaining such harmonies in the social realm. As he explains, “harmony presupposes differences.” This does not mean, however, that all differences are to be included. Rather, they fall into three classes: differences that we *accept*, differences that we

¹⁵ The original “Iron Chef” (料理の鉄人 *Ryōri no Tetsujin*) was launched in 1993 and immediately became a hit in Japan. It stopped production in 1999. It became popular internationally, distributed via the Food Network, and soon inspired other programs of its kind.

¹⁶ *Analects*, 12.16, Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 157.

¹⁷ James Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites, Vol. 1 and 2* (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1967), vol. 1, 414.

¹⁸ *Analects*, 1.12, 74.

¹⁹ See: *Nicomachean Ethics* 1131a.33, Aristotle and Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 1007 and Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony*, 122.

reject, and differences that we *tolerate*. Such designations need to be made with respect to the dynamic coherence (*li* 理) of the whole. In the optimal scenario, we “embrace difference of the first kind,” “cautiously examine and, when warranted, accept the third kind,” and “strive to eliminate or minimize the second kind.”²⁰

This is what “equity” means as a Chinese value—extending to each its “proper due.” The Chinese tradition tends to approach such matters differently than they are approached in the Greek-medieval tradition. In the Chinese tradition, the stress is on “weighing things up” (*quan* 權) in particular circumstances, whereas in the latter tradition the stress is on apprehending ratios that track onto fixed objects of knowledge.²¹

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By its very nature, harmony (*he*) is frustrated by the insistence that some single denominator characterize the resulting whole.

²⁰ Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony*, 143-147.

²¹ Early on in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates asks how one gives “justice to things” (*dikaiousunê*) and who is qualified to give each thing its “proper due.” Such moments in the philosophical corpus mark with unusual clarity the historical divergence of the Greek and Chinese approaches. Plato’s answer is that it is the expert in the relevant art (*technê*) who is best suited to adjudicate “the right” wherever the principles of that art obtain. Knowing (*episteme*) such principles and applying them case-by-case is what judiciousness comes to mean. The kind of *dao* 道-activity prioritized in the Chinese tradition, however, more closely resembles a knack (*empeiria*) than an art. It is not a form of casuistry commensurate with what we commonly find in the Greek-medieval tradition. Rather, it involves the ability to weigh (*quan* 權) situations in a discretionary sense so as to get the optimal result out of them. This renders rightness (*yi* 義) a relational rather than a static term. See: *Republic* 332a-e, Plato and John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1997), 976-977.

Wanting metaphysical guidance in this area, one naturally turns to William James. James’ pluralism emerges in tension with the “One” that was popular as the “Absolute” in the monistic idealism of his day. James’ key insight, which is radical in Western philosophy but rather unremarkable from an East Asian point of view, is that the “Whole/Part” and “One/Many” problems that result from monistic idealism are intractable so long as reality is regarded in static terms. “Time keeps budding into new moments,” James writes, “every one of which presents a content which in its individuality never was before and will never be again.”²² With this as the starting point, “wholeness” becomes *modal*. It becomes a recurrent feature of reality the character of which constantly changes.

This is easier to envision in Daoist terms. For the Daoism, *dao* 道 is constantly giving birth to novelty; the moment one designates everything here (*you* 有) as a “whole” it has already changed because something new has arrived. *Now* it is a different whole, and *now* it is another. Wholeness is thus never static. Given the steady influx of novelty, things change *within* relations of “coherence” (*li*) such that “oneness” is a dynamic *way* of being.

There are numberless *ways* of being “one.” For James, “Things are ‘with’ one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything. The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence.”²³ In such a world, “there are innumerable modes of union,” James notes. There is “neither absolute oneness nor absolute manyness,” but rather “a mixture of well-definable modes of both.”

²² “Some Problems of Philosophy,” William James and Bruce Kuklick, *William James: Writings, 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 1057.

²³ “A Pluralistic Universe,” William James and Bruce Kuklick, *William James: Writings, 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 776.

One-and-many are thus bound in *togetherness*: “co-ordinate features of the natural world.”²⁴

These are core ideas in the American philosophical tradition, and they are highly original in Western thought. In fact, for all practical purposes, William James single-handedly *invents* the modern term “pluralism”—which is remarkable to consider. Given the illustrious career of this term in contemporary discourse, it is surprising that James’ insights are not more often evoked. Perhaps such neglect is due to the fact that his reflections on pluralism were primarily confined to metaphysics and epistemology. James never got around to applying the notion to issues in the social and political realm. He had students, however, who did.

Horace Kallen, in his 1915 article in *The Nation*, “Democracy vs. the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality,” formulates a truly American, pluralistic alternative to the ersatz “Melting Pot” ideal. One century later, his argument still holds up remarkably well. Kallen begins by providing a broad overview of American immigration: the economic forces that drive it, the stratification that it introduces, and how “Americanization” as the adaptation of Anglo-Saxon attitudes by other ethnic groups factors into it. His conclusion is that “Americanization,” understood as the widespread adoption of Anglo-Saxon attitudes, is never going to happen—the situation is simply too complex and variable.

Thus, as it stands, suggests Kallen, “America” has yet to occur. “America is a word: as a historic fact, a democratic ideal of life, it is not realized at all.” The practical question then, Kallen asks, is *what kind* of society does the dominant classes in the United States really want? He writes:

At the present time there is no dominant American mind. Our spirit is inarticulate, not a voice, but a chorus of many voices each singing a rather different tune. How to get order out of this cacophony is the question for all those who are concerned about those things which alone justify wealth and power, concerned about justice, the arts, literature, philosophy, science. What must, what *shall* this cacophony become—a unison or a harmony? As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in a society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make civilization . . . within the limits set by nature they may vary at will, and the range and the variety of the harmonies may become wider and richer and more beautiful. But the question is, do the dominant classes in America want such a society?²⁵

Dewey read Kallen’s article with great interest and immediately wrote to him hoping to arrange a time to meet to discuss its thesis. In a rare personal aside, Dewey shares with Kallen reflections on his own ethnic heritage in relation to the national debate:

To put it personally: My forbears on both sides are Americans for over two hundred fifty years: they were I suppose partly English and partly Flemish in the beginning. I have some sentimental interest in the Flemish part, next to none in the English. And I

²⁴ “Some Problems in Philosophy,” 1046-1047.

²⁵ Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot,” *The Nation* 100, 2590, Feb. 18, 25 (1915), 194, 217.

cannot remember the time when I had any interest in the Anglo-Saxon talk. I want to see this country American and that means the English tradition reduced to a strain along with others. It is convenient for “Americans” to put the blame of things they don’t like on the “foreigners,” but I don’t believe that goes very deep; it is mostly irritation at some things they don’t like and an unwillingness to go below the surface. I quite agree with your orchestra idea, but upon condition we really get a symphony and not a lot of different instruments playing simultaneously. I never did care for the Melting Pot metaphor, but genuine assimilation *to one another*—not to Anglo-Saxondom—seems to be essential to an America. That each cultural section should maintain its distinctive literary and artistic traditions seems to me most desirable, but in order that it might have the more to contribute to others.²⁶

“Genuine assimilation *to one another*”—this is the touchstone for Dewey’s vision of a pluralistic, multi-ethnic, culturally diverse America. “To maintain that all the constituent elements, geographical, racial, cultural, in the United States should be put in the same pot and turned into a uniform and unchanging product,” Dewey writes, “is distasteful.” We must rather “respect those elements of diversification in cultural traits which differentiate our national life.”²⁷

The true nature of the American character now comes into view—“the peculiarity of *our* nationalism,” Dewey writes, “is its internationalism.”²⁸ “In our internal constitution we are actually interracial and international,” he ex-

plains. “It remains to [be seen],” Dewey writes, “whether we have the courage to face this fact and the wisdom to think out the plan of action which it indicates.”²⁹

These are profound statements. In order to fully appreciate them, one must overcome prevailing Eurocentric conceptions of the American experience and assume a broader view. Human history in North America began with Eurasian migrations 30,000 years ago, resulting in the evolution of a patchwork of cultural groups with diverse languages and customs. The arrival of Europeans is often treated as the “beginning” of the American experience—such that we imagine that the American character was forged in a mythical, stark encounter between “humans” (i.e. Europeans) and an untamed “wilderness.”

This narrative is entirely false. North America possessed a rich cultural history prior to the arrival of Europeans, and the latter’s experience was shaped through its encounter with the former. While Native American cultures were nearly annihilated by European-borne diseases (populations declined by as much as 90% between 1492 and 1650), there was a sophisticated cultural matrix in place along the eastern seaboard when the Europeans landed. They were greeted by existing territorial claims, trade networks, multiple languages, material technologies, tribal identities, arts and customs, animosities and alliances, and so on. The “New World” was hardly a blank slate. As Scott L. Pratt argues, the “problem of origins” in American philosophy has yet to fully recognize the context in which the American mind actually took shape.

American thinkers, most famously Ralph Waldo Emerson in his “American Scholar,” sought to distinguish themselves from Europe-

²⁶ *Correspondence of John Dewey* (03222), John Dewey to Horace M. Kallen, March 31, 1915.

²⁷ “The Principle of Nationality,” 10:289.

²⁸ “Nationalizing Education,” 206.

²⁹ “German Philosophy and Politics,” *Middle Works of John Dewey*, 8, 03.

an thinkers and to express something uniquely “American.” But what was this thing?

Pratt traces this indigenous “something” back to Roger Williams (1603-1683), our most famous exponent of religious liberty and defender of Native American land claims against British colonial charters. Williams learned to communicate with Native Americans and published a phrasebook, *A Key Into the Language of America* in 1643. He established relationships of trust and respect with indigenous peoples, especially with the Narragansett tribe. Against the colonial attitude of those like Cotton Mather, for whom Native Americans were future Christians at best, Williams’ intra-cultural experience involved assimilating the Narragansett custom of *wunnégin* (“Welcoming Strangers”) into his own Christian outlook, resulting in a concept of acceptance, friendliness, and civility unique to the American character.

Accordingly, as Pratt demonstrates, “Williams’ ideal of a plural community stands in strong contrast to Locke’s notion of toleration on a number of points.” Ideals that would eventually become the “common core of classical pragmatism,” which Pratt identifies as “interaction, pluralism, community, and growth,” resonate more strongly with the Native American concept of *wunnégin* than with anything in classical European liberalism.³⁰

While this ideal becomes diffuse in its influence and fails historically to prevent the emergence of the “colonial attitude” and the enshrinement of classical liberalism in the United States Constitution, its spirit ought still to be recognized as the indigenous spirit of America. Anyone who identifies as “American,” in any case, should understand this heritage and the

values native to the continent. “Welcoming Strangers” is the original American ideal.

Dewey understood, as well as anyone, that the most important agency for sustaining and transmitting such a welcoming character is a robust public education system—one that transmits America’s immigrant heritage and its significance. Such liberal education is the first line of defense against those who would be enemies to America.

Dewey refers to such agents as “the enemy within.” These are “the misleaders who attempt to create disunity and hatred among Americans,” those who “preach hatred and discrimination against Americans who happen to be darker skinned, speak with an accent, or share a minority faith.” Such enemies “work untiringly to exaggerate racial and religious differences” and thus “do not grasp the uniqueness of America.”³¹ As Dewey warns, “Skillful politicians and other self-seekers have always known how to play cleverly upon patriotism, and upon ignorance of other peoples, to identify nationalism with latent hatred of other nations.”³²

Liberal education ideally *liberates* the student from the limitation of the group biases into which she is born and prepares her for the “broader environment” of America and the world. By necessity, in order to ensure continuity and core learning standards, subject matter in public education must remain relatively uniform. “The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs,” however, “creates for all a new and broader environment. Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook

³⁰ Scott Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 19-20, 103-106, 124.

³¹ *Correspondence of John Dewey* (15121), John Dewey to Catherine B. Wurster on behalf of the “Common Council for American Unity,” April 4, 1949.

³² “Nationalizing Education,” 202.

upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated.”³³

Given recent events in American politics, it is worth hearing from Dewey at length about the role that public education plays in relation to “American nationalism.” Hardly a more cogent and relevant statement could be desired:

I want to mention only two elements in the nationalism which our education should cultivate. The first is that the American nation is itself complex and compound. Strictly speaking it is interracial and international in its make-up. It is composed of a multitude of peoples speaking different tongues, inheriting diverse traditions, cherishing varying ideals of life. This fact is basic to *our* nationalism as distinct from that of other peoples. Our national motto, “One from Many,” cuts deep and extends far. It denotes a fact which doubtless adds to the difficulty of getting a genuine unity. But it also immensely enriches the possibilities of the result to be attained. No matter how loudly any one proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism. Our unity cannot be a homogeneous thing like that of the separate states of Europe from which our population is drawn; it must be a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic which each contributing race and people has to offer.

I find that many who talk the loudest about the need of a supreme and unified Americanism of spirit really mean some special code or tradition to which they happen to be attached. They have some pet tradition which they would impose upon all. In thus measuring the scope of Americanism by some single element which enters into it they are themselves false to the spirit of America. Neither Englandism nor New-Englandism, neither Puritan nor Cavalier any more than Teuton or Slav, can do anything but furnish one note in a vast symphony.

The way to deal with hyphenism, in other words, is to welcome it, but to welcome it in the sense of extracting from each people its special good, so that it shall surrender into a common fund of wisdom and experience what it especially has to contribute. All of these surrenders and contributions taken together create the national spirit of America. The dangerous thing is for each factor to isolate itself, to try to live off its past, and then to attempt to impose itself upon other elements, or, at least, to keep itself intact and thus refuse to accept what other cultures have to offer, so as thereby to be transmuted into authentic Americanism.

In what is rightly objected to as hyphenism the hyphen has become something which separates one people from other peoples—and thereby prevents American nationalism. Such terms as Irish-American or Hebrew-American or German-American are false terms because they seem to assume something which is already in existence called America to which the other factor may be externally hitched on. The fact is the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character. This does not mean that he is part American,

³³ *Democracy and Education, Middle Works of John Dewey*, 9, 26.

and that some foreign ingredient is then added. It means that, as I have said, he is international and interracial in his make-up. He is not American plus Pole or German. But the American is himself Pole-German-English-French-Spanish-Italian-Greek-Irish-Scandinavian-Bohemian-Jew-and so on. The point is to see to it that the hyphen connects instead of separates. And this means at least that our public schools shall teach each factor to respect every other, and shall take pains to enlighten all as to the great past contributions of every strain in our composite make-up. I wish our teaching of American history in the schools would take more account of the great waves of migration by which our land for over three centuries has been continuously built up, and make every pupil conscious of the rich breadth of our national make-up. When every pupil recognizes all the factors which have gone into our being, he will continue to prize and reverence that coming from his own past, but he will think of it as honored in being simply one factor in forming a whole, nobler and finer than itself.³⁴

Such a statement leaves no question about where Dewey stands on questions of “American nationalism.” Over the years, some have misunderstood his approach to public education as endorsing “Americanization” in a more uniform sense. Sidney Hook was once asked about this, and he effectively put such readings to rest. The “*whole spirit* of Dewey’s theory of democracy and education requires a commitment to the philosophy of cultural pluralism,”

Hook replies. “You can announce it from the housetops on my authority.”³⁵

* * *

As Dewey observes, America’s (now unofficial) national motto, “From the Many, One” (*E Pluribus Unum*),³⁶ “cuts deep and extends far.”

The notion that the “one” emerges from the “many” without usurping the integrity of “each” is difficult to conceptualize without the kind of process-driven and aesthetic-oriented assumptions that early Chinese thinkers exhibit. In this respect, the Chinese notion of harmony (*he*) provides a conceptual tool that helps us to conceptualize the dynamic interplay between unity and diversity. It illustrates how in natural systems each constituent ingredient can contribute to a novel order the worth of which is greater than the sum of its parts.

E Pluribus Unum is a similar ideal. Emerging alongside process-oriented thinking in the West, the phrase traces back to the Latin translation of Heraclitus’ “Tenth Fragment,” which reads: “Out of many there comes one, and out of one, many.”³⁷ Its more direct classical source, however, is Virgil. The poet uses the phrase in his “*Moretum*,” a poem in honor of the herb-cheese salad favored by the Romans. *Moretum*

³⁵ *Correspondence of John Dewey* (21234), Sidney Hook to J. Christopher Eisele, May 15, 1974.

³⁶ In 1956, the 84th Congress of the United States adopted “In God We Trust” as the official U.S. motto, in violation (one would assume) of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Its constitutionality was first challenged in *Aronow vs. United States* in 1970, but the motto was upheld by the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Given this precedent, subsequent challenges have not gone very far. *E Pluribus Unum* remains our “unofficial” motto.

³⁷ “Tenth Fragment,” Reginald E. Allen, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, Third Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 41.

³⁴ “Nationalizing Education,” 204-206.

brings together the “many” (garlic, parsley, rue, onions, cheese, salt, coriander, vinegar, and oil) and mixes them into “one”—*E Pluribus Unum*. Thus, “Round all the mortar doth he go at last and into one coherent ball doth bring, the different portions, that it may name and likeness of a finished salad fit.”³⁸

The culinary association behind our motto calls to mind the soup analogy that informs harmony (*he*) in the Chinese tradition. This culinary ideal, again, is that the raw qualities (*zhi*) of various ingredients are showcased in the finished whole, just as music brings together different instruments in a symphonic harmony. When this is done well (*shan*), the process of bringing things together forms a coherence (*li*) in which each constituent is appreciated. For Confucians, family is ideally such an order. It facilitates the meaningful inclusion of its members and gives expression to their unique roles in the process.³⁹ The concept of “nation as a family” (*guojia* 國家) is founded on such an ideal—even to the extent that the distinction between the “nation” and the “family” often becomes unclear in the Confucian tradition, as Sor-hoon Tan demonstrates.⁴⁰

With respect to American nationhood, the challenge is to forge a truly multiethnic, international “family” within its borders. This involves calling forth and preserving differences. Horace Kallen sees the American nation not as a “Melting Pot” but as a “Cooking Pot” in which the mixing actually draws out different strains of human culture for inclusion in the finished

product. “The institutions of the Republic,” he writes, “have become the liberating cause and the background for the rise of the cultural consciousness and social autonomy” of cultural groups. “On the whole,” he argues, “Americanization has not repressed nationality. Americanization has liberated nationality.”⁴¹

The truth of this remains an empirical question. Surely there is a vast difference between first and third generation Americans, with the dilution of cultural difference plain to see. Americanization thus requires, as Dewey says, a robust public commitment to its own multicultural heritage. The social, economic, and industrial forces that drive homogenization in America are not uniquely “American” forces—or so I would submit. Global capitalism threatens local cultures *everywhere*, including in the United States.

The best hope for America, I believe, is to reconnect with its own national spirit. To regard *E Pluribus Unum* as a process of homogenization violates America’s history as well as its deepest philosophical heritage. Harmony (*he*) serves as an important corrective to such misperceptions—an ancient Chinese ideal that, odd as it may sound, has the potential to remind America of what it means to achieve a more perfect union.

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³⁸ “Moretum,” Virgil and John Augustine Wilstach, *The Works of Virgil*, vol. 1, translated by John Augustine Wilstach (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1884), 123.

³⁹ The objection that “dysfunctional families” exist only begs the question. Families become dysfunctional precisely when they fail to realize the normative measure of harmony (*he* 和).

⁴⁰ Sor-hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 60.

⁴¹ Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot,” 219.

ophy, Vol. 2 (*SUNY Press, 2019*). He is also the author of *Mencius on Becoming Human* (*SUNY Press, 2005*). He is editor of *Appreciating the Chinese Difference: Engaging Roger T. Ames on Methods, Issues, and Roles* (*SUNY Press, 2018*) and co-editor with Roger T. Ames of *孟子心性之學 Studies of Mencius on Feelings and Nature* (*Social Sciences Academic Press, Beijing, 2004*).