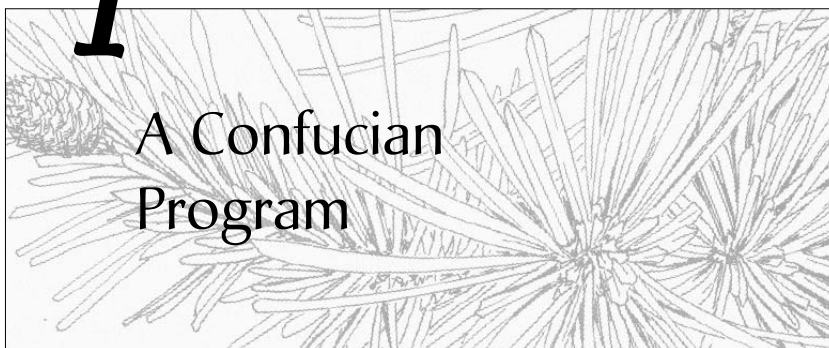


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A Confucian Program



CONFUCIANISM IS A LIVING tradition that contributes to contemporary global philosophical inquiry and religious culture formation. The effectiveness with which Confucianism does this, however, is proportional to the extent to which it engages the realities of contemporary life. For this reason, the cultural expressions of the ancient Confucianism of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, and the Neo-Confucianism of Zhou Dunyi, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming, are inadequate by themselves for the tradition's contemporary life. We need to understand the Confucianism of the past in historical perspective, and the Confucianism of the present in the perspective of thought-forms that address contemporary problems and discussions.

Contemporary Confucianism therefore cannot limit itself to critical studies of the great thinkers of the past. Of course it is imperative for a tradition continually to examine and reinterpret its past, and so historical studies are always necessary. Nevertheless, this cannot be the whole of contemporary Confucian philosophical practice. I shall argue here that Confucianism needs to expand its family of discourses in four related areas. It needs a contemporary metaphysical discourse, a contemporary discourse in philosophical cosmology in connection with science, a contemporary discourse about human nature and experience, and a contemporary discourse of social theory. In each of these four discourses, classical themes of Confucianism indicate what the interests and positions of Confucianism ought to be. The discourses themselves arise not only from East Asian thought but also from South Asian and Western traditions, and they need to have forms that reflect the best of the

current discussions. Soon the Muslim tradition will enter the conversation. As a living tradition, Confucianism can contribute to the current discussions. Nevertheless, Confucianism also will be changed by engaging those discussions: this is what it means to be a living tradition.

In what follows, I shall say first, regarding each topic, a bit about what I mean by metaphysics, philosophical cosmology, human nature, and social theory. Then I shall indicate the classic Confucian motifs and themes that are at stake in each. Briefly I shall suggest what I believe the shape of each new Confucian discourse should be. And finally I shall indicate how Confucianism itself is changed by the new discourse.

METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics is the Western term indicating the philosophical problems having to do with being and nonbeing, what it means to exist, what kinds of things there are, and why there is something rather than nothing. The word comes from the title of Aristotle's book dealing with these issues. Metaphysics has been a central philosophical discipline in the West, and also in South Asia. Its importance lies not only in the intrinsic interest of its topic but in the fact that it defines what is ultimately real and therefore sets the patterns for what is ultimately important in life. One's metaphysics determines the shape of one's ultimate orientations.

I need to say a word in defense of metaphysics as an important discourse, for two reasons. The first reason is that in the West many people since Kant have argued that metaphysics is impossible, a vain form of inquiry. But what they had in mind as metaphysics was the foundationalist project of establishing cognitively certain and a priori metaphysical knowledge as a base on which all other knowledge can be built. By contrast, I understand metaphysics to be the generation and defense of good hypotheses about the problems of being, and so forth. Hypotheses are always fallible, though not always wrong. Metaphysical hypotheses reflect a particular history and language and are subject to correction. This surely was what Plato and Aristotle thought they were doing when they dealt with the problems of being—developing the best hypotheses or theories. Spinoza and Leibniz did believe that they were establishing certain and a priori metaphysical theories, and they were wrong about that. Nevertheless, their theories can be understood to be hypotheses and judged according to how good the cases are for them. Dialectic is the kind of argument in Western philosophy by which metaphysical theories are compared and judged relative to one another. The metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead in the twentieth century is a magnificent recent example of a grand set of hypotheses about the most basic categories of being.

The second objection to metaphysics as a discourse for Confucians is the claim that the Confucian tradition has no metaphysics, only ethics. True, Confucianism does not have a densely elaborated history of metaphysical discussions, as the Western and South Asian traditions have. Confucius himself sometimes turned aside metaphysical questions. It will be necessary for contemporary Confucianism to borrow much of the language and history of Western and South Asian metaphysics if it is to develop its own metaphysical discourse for the contemporary conversation. Nevertheless, Confucianism does have deep metaphysical motifs from which it derives orientation toward what is ultimate in reality. One of the classic discussions is in Zhou Dunyi's *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*, and it is worth quoting at length because it will be useful in discussing philosophical cosmology too.

The Ultimate of Non-being and also the Great Ultimate! The Great Ultimate through movement generates yang. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquility the Great Ultimate generates yin. When tranquility reaches its limit, activity begins again. So movement and tranquility alternate and become the root of each other, giving rise to the distinction of yin and yang, and the two modes are thus established. By the transformation of yang and its union with yin, the Five Agents of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth arise. When these five material forces are distributed in harmonious order, the four seasons run their course. The Five Agents constitute one system of yin and yang, and yin and yang constitute one Great Ultimate. The Great Ultimate is fundamentally the Non-ultimate.¹

This is a complicated passage about which there has been much contentious discussion. Nevertheless it has been very important in the development of the Confucian tradition, summing up not only ancient themes but also motifs of thought in Daoism and Buddhism. I venture to say that the metaphysical motifs of Confucianism that should be embodied in contemporary Confucian metaphysics are these, stated as theses:

1. That to be is to have features, and this is significantly different from non-being, which has no features.
2. Nonbeing is more fundamental than being and gives rise to being.
3. That to be a thing is to be a harmony, at least of yin and yang elements.
4. That to be a harmony is to have value.
5. That there is no "reason" for being or the Great Ultimate to emerge from non-being: it just does.

The importance of these metaphysical motifs for Confucianism can be seen from their negations.

1. If there were no difference between being with features and nonbeing without features, and nonbeing were denied, there would be no subtlety to being, nor mystery, only positivistic presence, contrary to the Confucian sensibility.
2. If nonbeing were not the source of being, then the contingency of being would fail to be registered.
3. If having features in harmony were not the nature of things, things could be conceived as not related to one another, though in Confucian thought all things are related.
4. If harmonies were not valuable, then the aesthetic character of existence would be impossible and the aesthetic perceptiveness of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom would be false.
5. If there were a reason why being emerges from nonbeing, then nonbeing would have the determinate features necessary for having a motive or goal, and Confucians would ask whence such a "god" arises. The contingency of features is explained only by what can have no features. Nonbeing is simply fecund from the perspective of being.

Now a contemporary metaphysics for Confucianism might take the following form, I suggest. Let it begin with an hypothesis about determinate being as consisting of harmonies with features of two kinds. One kind of feature in a harmony derives from other harmonies to which the first harmony is determinately related. This kind of feature can be called "conditional" because it is how those other harmonies condition the harmony at hand. The other kind of feature can be called "essential" because those features are how the harmony integrates its conditional features to attain its own singular space-time existence. Because of the conditional features, all things are determinately related to some other things, not mere isolated atoms; because of the essential features, each thing has its own being and is not reducible to its relations. A harmony is the fitting together of all its features, a balance, and harmonies constantly shift with time, although that shifting is a topic for philosophical cosmology.

Harmonies relate to one another within space-time by virtue of their various conditional features. But for one harmony to relate to another, its essential features also must be together with the essential features of the other because neither would exist at all without the integration of both essential and conditional features. The mutual relation of essential features of different harmonies cannot be in space-time, for that consists of only conditional relations. It needs rather to derive from or consist in a nontemporal ground that itself has no features, that is, featureless nonbeing or the Ultimate of Nonbeing. If the ground of the relation between essential features of different things were itself to have features, then a deeper ground would have to be found to relate the ground to the harmonies, and an infinite regress would ensue. Therefore, the featureless nonbeing must give rise to being with features. In the West,

this has often been explained in the language of divine creation. But if God is conceived to have features that allow for creation, then a deeper ground behind God and created harmonies would be needed. If God is conceived to have no features, then God is indistinguishable from nonbeing. A Confucian metaphysics needs language that says that nonbeing gives rise to determinate being as harmonies, without suggesting that nonbeing itself has a nature that would need further explanation. Determinateness or order needs explanation; complete indeterminateness does not.²

Another level of metaphysical hypothesis is needed to understand the hypothesis about harmonies. A harmony can be understood in terms of four elements: (1) the harmony's pattern or form; (2) its components, each of which might have an independent career outside the harmony; (3) the harmony's existential location in space-time; and (4) the value achieved by getting the components together in the particular pattern the harmony has, in the place and time of the harmony. The analysis of pattern or form in harmony is the occasion for developing the Confucian theme of Heaven, or Principle (*li*). The analysis of the components of a harmony, each of which is itself a harmony of course, is the occasion for developing the Confucian theme of Earth or material force (*qi*). The analysis of the existential location of a harmony is the occasion for developing the Confucian themes of spontaneity and change, and the multiple locations of patterns as microcosms and macrocosms. The analysis of value in harmony is the occasion for the development of the Confucian sense that harmony is normative and disharmony is the root of evil.³

How would Confucianism be changed by committing itself to metaphysical hypotheses such as these? First, it would enter in to a more abstract discourse than has been customary in Confucianism. Second, it would find ways of expressing its main metaphysical themes and motifs in language that also has been used to debate the metaphysical points of Western philosophy, allowing for clearer comparisons as well as dialectical arguments. Third, it would have found a way to express its deep commitment that the universe and human life have real value over against claims in other metaphysical views that reality is value free and that all values are mere human projections. All of these changes would be positive gains, I believe.

PHILOSOPHICAL COSMOLOGY

Philosophical cosmology differs from metaphysics in being more specific to the traits of our world and in being especially sensitive to the findings and speculations of natural science. Frequently, philosophical cosmology is taken to be continuous with metaphysics, and some thinkers use the terms interchangeably. Philosophical cosmology needs to be able to register all the scientific theories

that have plausibility as ways of making the cosmology specific. The cosmology should not dictate to science, but must be able to register and reflect science.

The Confucian tradition has a grand set of cosmological commitments. The hypothesis that to be a thing is to be a change stems from the roots of the *Yijing* and dominates the Song Neo-Confucian debates about material force and principle. Along with Daoists, Confucians conceive a harmony to be an event of change, a harmony's pattern to be a pattern of change (as in the *Yijing* hexagrams), a harmony's components to be various processes, a harmony's existential location to be connection, endurance and/or motion, and a harmony's value to be the value of an event, a happening. The Confucian cosmology also regards Heaven as the source of order or pattern that allows various processes to come together as harmonizing. Heaven or principle is not so much itself a pattern as that which makes diverse things fit together in formal patterns. Because harmony is good, always achieving the value of combining the components with a particular pattern in a particular place and time, Heaven or principle is the source of goodness, and is what we look to as normative for human affairs in which we have some control over processes.

Another cosmological theme important to Confucianism (and Daoism) is spontaneity. For all its emphasis on change and process, Confucianism has never held to a strict determinism of the sort that intrigued Western scientists for the last several centuries. Spontaneity not only allows human beings to insert their intentions into process, it also allows for the deepest realm of the relation between nonbeing and being to express itself in process. In a spontaneous act, a person reaches down and inside to the fecundity of nonbeing and places it in a particular circumstance. Spontaneity is a function of essential features bringing something new to the conditions within which a harmony happens.

The obvious Western language for Confucianism to develop for its cosmological discourse is process philosophy. Much work has already been done to develop Confucianism in the philosophical categories of Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy.⁴ I believe myself that Whitehead's philosophy needs to be considerably modified by eliminating its conception of God, developing a notion of enduring though always changing entities, and by introducing a notion of eternity against which to make sense of process and change.⁵ But these disagreements are internal to debates within process philosophy in general. Confucianism would be well served to enter these debates in order to find contemporary expressions for its commitment to change, to normative patterns, and to spontaneity.

The most important reason for contemporary Confucianism to engage the current debates in philosophical cosmology is so that, in turn, it can engage modern science. Contemporary Confucians of course can be natural scientists. But how do they connect their science with the themes of their Confucian heritage? A customary Marxist criticism of Confucianism is that it

is nonscientific. Indeed, the classic texts of Confucianism are truly incommensurate with modern science. Developing a Confucian philosophical cosmology that faithfully represents Confucian cosmological themes and motifs and that also is designed to represent the plausible scientific theories can make Confucianism commensurate with science.

Traditional Confucianism surely would be changed if it were able to take scientific discussions into its own discourse by extending its discourse to philosophical cosmology. This would tone down the humanistic elitism that some Confucians have had in antipathy to the modern world. It would also allow Confucians to take scientific literacy to be a crucial part of humane education. These changes are for the better.

HUMAN NATURE

Human nature is a profound theme in classical Confucianism; some would say it is the principal theme, to the exclusion of metaphysics and philosophical cosmology, although I have argued that this is a false exclusion. The Western term *nature* suggests a static pattern that does not fit well with the process or change-oriented philosophy of East Asia. *Experience* is the Western term better able to convey the Confucian sense of human dynamism.

The Confucian theme of human nature emphasizes a kind of primordial responsiveness to the values of things, the “center” in the *Zhongyong*. Confucius’s conception of humaneness (*ren*) had to do with deferring to people according to their real natures, acknowledging the various particularities of value in their character and station. To do so, the sage needs to perceive accurately, and education is required for accurate perception. The sagely response to things is illustrated in Mencius’s “Four Beginnings,” in which the elemental instincts of the heart are to do the right thing. Of course, selfishness can get in the way, as well as incompetence, and so education and character development are needed for the inner good heart of human nature to express itself in complicated overt action. For a sage to be “sincere,” to be “one body with the world,” requires that all the avenues of perception and learning, on the one hand, and of action close at hand and at a distance, on the other, need to be brought into harmony. This might take a lifetime of devotion to the path of the sage: Confucius claimed to have attained it only when he was seventy years old. (It also requires a community of good ritual, which I shall discuss shortly.)

Our contemporary conceptions of human nature derive in large part from the natural and social sciences and do not connect easily with the Confucian classic motifs. Contemporary Confucianism therefore needs to develop a discourse about human nature that can relate to science at the same time that it expresses the classic motifs. I suggest, therefore, that Confucianism engage the

philosophical discourse of the American pragmatists, beginning with Charles S. Peirce, which develops the hypothesis that human beings are fundamentally interpreters.⁶ Human experience is always a matter of interpretation. Interpretation requires accurate input from the things interpreted. Interpretation also requires accurate response to the things interpreted. People interpret well or poorly, and as the Confucian tradition has always said, proper education is required for interpretations to register and respond accurately to the things in the world that are to be interpreted. Specifically, I believe the Confucian discourse on human experience as interpretive should focus on four ways of engaging the values of things with proper comportment toward them: (1) imagination, (2) judgment, (3) theorizing, and (4) the pursuit of responsibility.

A pragmatic theory of imagination says that the signs we develop in our cultural semiotic systems are structured so as to register what it is important for us to register in our environment. In simple cultures these can be very practical indeed, such as signs to distinguish predators from prey, good food from poison, things that might be helpful for shelter and safety, things that are immediately beautiful or repulsive. We register the values of such things in our discriminating signs because they are good or bad for us, in a narrow sense of self-interest. As cultures become more sophisticated, however, we ask more about the values things have in themselves and construe our own interests more broadly so as to be able to relate to what is important in the environment. Imagination supplies the ideas, the symbols, the signs, by which we can make discriminations concerning what is valuable. This is part of the Confucian theme of being able to grasp things according to the character of their value. Imagination by itself merely supplies the signs by which we take in the world: it does not make explicit judgments about whether it is true that the value of a thing we engage is as our signs say it is.

Judgment says that signs interpret things truly or falsely. With judgments go the arguments and cases that are to be made for them. A judgment is true, according to my hypothesis, when it carries across into the experience of the interpreter the value that characterizes the object interpreted, in the respect in which the interpreting signs stand for the object. That is a complicated formula, but its significance for my point is that truth involves the carrying of value over from the object interpreted into the interpreter. The judgment says that the object is a thing with the particular character of value indicated in the sign. Knowing whether that judgment is true depends on independent confirmation of the fact that it carries over the character of its object's value into the interpreter. Of course, most of our judgments are made with the confidence that our personal and social habits of confirmation act automatically and with authority. One special Confucian advantage of this theory of truth and judgment is that it expresses truth as a matter of a causal connection between interpreters and their objects. This means that it has no

room for a Cartesian dualism of body and mind. Like Confucianism's view of mind, mental judgment, according to this hypothesis, is a kind of subtle action that is part of nature.⁷

Judgments are rarely made by themselves in isolation. Rather they are set within systems of other judgments that are theories. A theory is a set of judgments or hypotheses that gives something of a synoptic view of its subject matter. Charles Peirce said that theorizing has several important elements. One is the imaginative act of guessing at the integrating idea; a second is the analytic act of translating that integrating idea into formal consistent terms from which logical deductions can be made; a third is the inferential act of deducing what ought to appear in experience if the theory is true, or what would refute the theory if it did appear in experience; a fourth is the testing of the terms of the theory to see whether they distort experience; and a fifth is the cumulative assessment of whether the experiential evidence adds up to confirm, disconfirm, or suggest modifications to the theory.

The most common objection to theorizing in contemporary thought comes from postmodern thinkers who point out that every set of theoretical categories determines what registers as important. Most theories, especially of human culture, marginalize or completely ignore the existence of people who lack the power to control the theories. For instance, the experience of women and ethnic minorities often has been screened out because the dominant theoretical categories recognize only men and the cultural elite, or so postmodernists argue. The answer to this powerful criticism is that the fourth step of theorizing needs to be taken scrupulously. That is, the theory needs to include within its own development and defense a careful survey to make sure that nothing is being left out because it fails to register in the theoretical terms. All theories are fallible and thus subject to this and other kinds of corrections. The Confucian investment in theorizing is to make sure that theories do not distort the values of the things, particularly the persons, that the theories are about.⁸

The fourth kind of interpretation by which we should conceive human experience is the pursuit of responsibility. Pursuit of responsibility, of course, requires the other three ways of engaging the values of things: imagination to have the terms to recognize things' worth, judgment to ascertain the truth of particular interpretations, and theories to provide orientation and a field of vision. Interpretation, as I have argued, changes interpreters so that they experience the world differently and act in accord with that. Not only does interpretation change the way people experience the world, it changes the purposes and valuational drives by which they engage and act. Some actions are better than others, and so people are under obligation to do the better insofar as they can be known. Personal responsibility is the subjective form by which obligations are faced. We are each responsible for doing what ought to be done, when different possible actions lead to different values in the results.

Now actions are rarely done by isolated individuals. Nearly everything we do, even such simple things as listening to a lecture, are conjoint actions, in this case requiring the speaking and the hearing, and the thinking together on a topic expressed in one language system and interpreted in another. How do we act responsibly together? By jointly playing rituals, with many different roles coordinated as in a dance. Language itself is a paradigmatic ritual. But language-speaking always rests within a larger ritual context, such as the ritual character of lectures in academic settings with translators, and so forth. International lectures are sometimes difficult because we do not have clear and easy rituals for working around language barriers. Rituals make possible conjoint actions that would not be possible without them. This appreciation of ritual is Confucianism's most important direct contribution to contemporary philosophy, in my opinion.⁹

I strongly recommend this complex hypothesis about interpretation relative to the values of things as a contemporary discourse within which Confucianism can invest itself. It would bring Confucianism into play with semiotic theory and ally it with the rich tradition of pragmatism. Moreover, it would allow Confucianism to contribute its most original motif: the necessity of ritual for human formation.

How would Confucianism be changed by developing itself in this discourse about human nature and experience? First of all, the emphasis on ritual would bring Xunzi back into favor as one of the most original minds of the tradition, after long having been subordinated to Mencius. Second, Confucianism would internalize a rich discussion within pragmatism, which several important thinkers have advocated.¹⁰ Third, it would give Confucianism a philosophical language for contemporary epistemology that expresses its basic motifs about human nature, especially the valuational element. These are all changes for the better.

SOCIAL THEORY

My discussion so far has been strangely neglectful of something that Confucianism has known since its beginning, namely, the social character of human reality. We become persons in families and fulfill highest virtue through generalized forms of filial piety. Confucians have known the importance of ritual for defining character and better than most other traditions of philosophy have understood the political roles of individuals and groups. Now let me correct this neglect in my argument.

The problem for contemporary Confucianism in China is that it has been under attack by Marxist philosophers for decades as being mired in a feudal social theory. To be sure, there are complicated problems defining feudalism,

in Europe or in China, and Marxism might not have the last word on the topic. Nevertheless, its attack is quite correct if Confucianism is to be limited to the social theory it developed in the Zhou, Song, or Ming dynasties. As a Western philosophy, Marxism is not limited to the feudal social theories of Thomas Aquinas and other Western thinkers who lived in feudal Europe. On the contrary, it arose out of nineteenth-century social science. To answer the Marxist criticism, Confucianism needs to develop a contemporary social theory that is true to its classic themes and motifs but that addresses contemporary realities. These realities include not only the economic situation that Marxists would emphasize, but also the clash of civilizations, the revival of fundamentalist religions of all sorts, the vastly expanded cross-cultural communication enabled by fast travel and the internet, global migrations, and a host of other issues.

The deep themes that Confucianism needs to develop in a contemporary social theory are humaneness (*ren*) and ritual propriety (*li*). The importance of these themes makes it impossible for Confucianism to adopt the discourses of the two most important families of social theory. One of these Confucianly impossible families says that power is the key to social relations. Marxism and postmodern deconstructionism are examples of the approach to social understanding through power, although that has been characteristic of much European thinking since Thomas Hobbes. Power relations, of course, are real and need to be conceptualized accurately. But a Confucian social theory would want to understand power relations as judged by criteria of humaneness, and it would suggest that the strongest kind of power in the long run is that which is embodied in ritual structures. The other family of approaches to social theory that Confucianism should not befriend is the social contract theory that bases itself on conceptions of a state of nature prior to civil society. Confucians know that there is no state of pre-socialized nature for human beings and that ritual, and therefore civil society, permeate everything human. Social contract theories represent human nature, in a state of nature, as being essentially selfish, either aggressively so as in Hobbes's theory, or acquisitively so as in Locke's. As Xunzi pointed out, only infants and people who have learned no ritual are essentially selfish. The sad effect of social contract theory is to create rituals within which selfish behavior is tolerated and even made normative. But this is inhumane. In this point lies a profound Confucian critique of the interpretation of capitalism based on social contract theory.

What is the shape of a viable contemporary Confucian social theory? This extremely complicated question depends upon many forms of analysis of the social conditions of our time. For instance, family structure is very different now from what it was in the times when Confucians developed their classical notions of family. Perhaps other institutions such as places of employment and educational institutions perform some of the work that ancient

agrarian families were supposed to perform. I believe that the key to understanding our current social conditions is to identify the ritual behaviors that are in them and ask critical Confucian moral questions about whether the rituals make humane life possible in those conditions. If they do not, what rituals would improve them? If no rituals would improve them, can the social conditions themselves be improved?

Stepping back from the analysis of particular social conditions in Confucian terms, I believe that the central theoretical principle of a contemporary Confucian social theory is a reversal of a certain point in social contract theory. In British social contract theory, of either Hobbes's or Locke's sort, people were construed to have no responsibilities at all in the state of nature. They have desires, instincts, passions, and fears, but no responsibilities. According to the social contract theory, people enter into civil society, surrendering some of their power to the government, in order to be able to get more of what they want and avoid more of what they fear. Once people are in civil society, they then have responsibilities for being citizens of that society, responsibilities such as obeying the law, respecting authority, honoring business contracts, and taking part in government so as to make the best possible civil society that would let everyone get more of what they want and avoid more of what they fear. Even in civil society, in which social contract theorists admit we always are, there is nothing normative, nothing good or bad, about our desires and fears except when they are prohibited or commanded by civil law. The bottom line in social contract theory is that people are free to do whatever they want so long as it does not interfere with others doing the same as this is defined by the laws of the civil society.

Now I suggest a Confucian reversal of this point. I hypothesize that everyone by nature (which of course includes our ritual constitution) is responsible for everything that ought to be done in a society except where the rituals of civil society assign the responsibility to some specific people. Where social contract theory says that no one is responsible for anything unless assigned the responsibility by civil society, I say everyone is responsible for everything unless civil society channels it elsewhere. If there were no civil society, no ritual structure, which says that you are responsible for feeding your family and I am responsible for feeding mine, then I have the responsibility to feed your family. This is because it is objectively better for your family to be fed than to starve and, if no one else will attend to it, the obligation becomes my responsibility. Of course, this is an impossible situation—I cannot feed everyone and neither can you. So human societies are all structured somewhat to assign general obligations such as getting people fed to the responsibilities of specific people or specific roles. We would not have evolved into human beings without our primitive ancestors developing some division of labor, that is, ritualized societies. Looked at this way, our societies

are ritualized in a remarkably good way, and rituals are very basic adaptive necessities for the evolution of human life.

Nevertheless, in some social conditions people do starve. Perhaps it is because there is no one around whose role it is to feed them. Perhaps it is because the division of labor in agriculture cannot produce enough food. Whatever the reason for the failure, it becomes everyone's responsibility once again to do something about it. Of course, we say that we have governments to take on these responsibilities when the ritualized social system breaks down; but sometimes governments fail too. When the ritualized societies, including their governments, break down, then responsibility devolves again on everyone to do something about that. When someone starves to death, we are all a little guilty, even when it is not our assigned role in society to feed that person.

The reason Confucianism should invest in this reversed social contract discourse is because of its commitment to humaneness. Where people are hurt by a broken social system, it is inhumane not to help them. The Confucian heart "cannot bear the sufferings of others." All the social sciences should be brought to bear to understand why a social system is broken or inadequate for humane life. The Confucian use of those sciences, however, is governed by the search for the possibility of humaneness. Confucianism is famous, infamous in the eyes of Moists and some Enlightenment moralists, for its principle of "love with differences." This was taken to mean that one should love one's family more than the village and its laws, and one's village more than the empire, and one's empire more than people in other empires. Confucianism rejected universal love of Mozi's sort. I believe that what was presupposed, though not acknowledged, in the "love with differences" idea was a working ritualized social system that clearly defined responsibilities in family, village, empire, and for the barbarians. When that system breaks down, it is inhumane not to care for the barbarian. In Confucius's time the social system was very broken. His response was to teach rituals for reestablishing family responsibilities, productive friendship, local government, and a culture of proper ministerial responsibilities within the empire. He recognized that it was impossible to help all the villagers and barbarians even though it was inhumane not to do so. His remedy was the improvement of the ritual structures of society. So, a Confucian approach to social theory should focus on examining how the ritual structures that institutionalize society make humaneness possible, or fail to do so. All the sciences of society are at its disposal.¹¹

I fear that I have both talked too long and said too little about any one topic to have been enlightening. My point, however, has been only to sketch some new directions for the development of Confucianism in the contemporary world. As a Confucian myself, I affirm the need to understand and honor the history of the tradition. Yet we also have the responsibility to extend the

tradition to meet the needs of philosophy today. My own work for many years now has been in the development of the discourses in metaphysics, philosophical cosmology, human nature as interpretation, and social theory that I have discussed here, and footnoted so shamelessly. The chief strategic argument of this first chapter is to justify my hope that the body of my philosophic work, which looks so Western, is in fact a direct contribution to the development of Confucianism in the twenty-first century. I thank you for allowing me to invite you into this Boston Confucian family of discourses.