**What Can Americans Learn from Confucianism?**

Jay McDaniel

**1** America’s best hope is to adopt a more Confucian lifestyle: more focused on education, more respectful of old people, better able to subordinate private needs to public good, more responsible to the needs of family, more polite in our daily lives, and more hardworking. Of course, many Americans wouldn’t call this adopting a Confucian lifestyle. They would call it becoming a good and responsible person. These are among the virtues that Americans come to admire, when they begin to learn about Confucian-influenced cultures. Confucianism is a window into these and other virtues.

**2** If Americans take time to study Confucianism, they may quickly realize that it is quite different from their own cultural beliefs. Its focus is on the world itself, as a place where ultimate meaning is found. If we equate ultimate meaning with what is truly sacred in life, then Confucianism finds the sacred in the secular, in the relationships of ordinary life.

**3** The sacred is found in preparing and sharing meals with family and friends over a dinner table; in harmonious and respectful relations in the workplace; in being a gracious and hospitable host to guests who visit your home; in appreciating the gift of learning and taking “education” as one of life’s greatest gifts; in having a sense of inner self-discipline and restraint; in being polite and respectful to old people with rich life wisdom; in being willing to give yourself to the needs of your family even at the expense of personal sacrifice; in having the freedom to live simply and non-ostentatiously, in a humane and caring way, without needing to be famous.

**4** These are among the primary values of a *living* Confucianism: a Confucianism for ordinary life. But the values at issue are best realized, not by reading about them in books, but rather by seeing them in action, as exemplified in the humane grace of another person: a grandfather, a grandmother, an aunt, an uncle, a teacher, a cousin, a friend. In the Confucian tradition, we learn to become virtuous by seeing others who are virtuous and by being inspired by their example.

**5** Underlying these values is an even more fundamental value that permeates every one of them: a sense that harmony is the highest ideal in life. The harmony that is so important in East Asia has diverse expressions. It is a harmony that can be heard in music, seen in the variety of foods on a dinner table, felt in mutually respectful relations with other people and in the more general order of the natural world. This harmony is not sameness. It is not a collapse of everything into one thing. It is not the harmony of a statue that seems fixed in one place. It is a moving harmony, a changing harmony, a dynamic harmony.

**6** In other words, Confucianism is, above all things, a leaning toward harmony as life’s highest ideal. The harmony at issue is dynamic not static, flexible not fixed, diversified not homogenized. It is a harmony that includes healthy disagreements and has a democratic spirit, respectful of the voices of individuals as well as groups.

**7** Among Western philosophers, Alfred North Whitehead offers a similar vision. He sees harmonious intensity and intense harmony as the happiness — the satisfaction — which all living beings seek at every moment of their lives. Love, for Whitehead, is the ultimate form of harmony. In Confucianism this is called human-heartedness or Ren (仁). The loving person is a person whose heart is attuned to harmony and who embodies harmony in his or her own life.

**8** Finally here is a question: Is Confucianism enough? Can a person find its alternative way for a healthy and satisfying life? My own hope is that self-identified Christians and Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, will gradually learn more and more about the wisdom of Confucianism. Living Confucianism can enrich the practice of other cultures. There are also the large numbers of people in many parts of the world who do indeed want to be good people, who find themselves leaning toward harmony, and who find the various meanings of ordinary life — family, friendships, service — sufficient for a satisfying life. Some people speak of them as spiritual. This can simply be called being a good person.

**9** The living Confucianism of China and other East Asian nations can help people all over the world grow in the arts of becoming good people. It can help people of all cultures. As Americans enter into the new age we can welcome, and indeed celebrate, the living Confucianism we find in East Asian friends. Every time we find ourselves living with respect for others; every time we help Heaven by sharing goodness with the world; every time we choose to live simply and humbly, without needing to be the center of attention, we are Confucian in our way. And there is something beautiful in it.

**从儒学中，美国人能学到什么？**

杰伊·麦克丹尼尔

1 美国人最大的愿望就是过上一种更儒家式的生活：更重视教育，更尊敬老人，个人需求能更好地服从集体利益，对家人更尽责，在日常生活中更有礼貌，在工作中更努力。当然，许多美国人并不将此称为儒家式的生活方式，而是称之为做一个更好且更有责任感的人。正是美国人开始学习儒家文化时，他们才开始赞美这些美德。儒家思想为学习这些和其他美德提供了一个窗口。

2 如果美国人花点功夫研究儒家思想的话，他们很快就会明白，与他们自己的文化信仰不同，儒家关注的是这个世界本身，并将之视为终极意义之所在。如果我们将这种终极意义等同于生活中真正神圣的东西，那么儒家便能在世俗之中，在日常生活的种种关系之中找到神圣。

3 这种神圣随处可见，在餐桌前，与家人、朋友一同准备和享用餐食；在工作中，与同事和睦互敬；在客人来访时，做一个亲切殷勤的主人；在学习中，感恩学习天赋，并将“教育”视为人生一大馈赠；在与人交流时，懂得自律节制；面对老人时，恭敬有礼，尊重他们拥有源于阅历的智慧；在家庭问题上，能为家人之所需而付出，哪怕以牺牲自身利益为代价；在个人追求中，以仁义之道，简单生活，自在由心，不追逐名利，不招摇浮夸。

4 所有这些价值观念基本体现了现实中的儒学，亦即日常生活的儒学。然而，要更好地实现我们所探讨的价值观，读书是远远不够的，最好是从行动中领悟，从别人的仁爱中去感受。这些人包括爷爷、奶奶、阿姨、叔叔、老师、表兄弟姐妹以及朋友。在儒家传统里，我们从品行端正的人那里学习如何变得品行端正，从他们的事例中得到启示。

5 这些价值是基于一种更为根本的价值，这个根本价值贯穿以上每个价值：它便是生活的最高境界——和谐。在东亚地区，这种和谐非常重要，且有不同的表现形式。它可闻于音乐之中，可见于餐桌上丰富多样的食物之中，可感于人与人之间的互敬互重以及自然大道。这种和谐并非一味地求同。它不是毁万物而成就一物，更非固定在某个地方的一座和谐雕塑。这种和谐是不断运动的、变化的、动态的。

6 换句话说，儒学，最重要的是，倾向于将和谐视为至高的生活理想。我们所探讨的和谐生机勃勃而非暮气沉沉，圆融通达而非一成不变，百花齐放而非一枝独秀。这种和谐允许合理分歧的存在，它秉承民主精神，尊重个人和集体的声音。

7 在西方哲学家之中，阿尔弗雷德·诺斯·怀特海德持有相似的观点。他将和而不同视为快乐——即满足——所有的人每时每刻都在追寻的东西。爱，在怀特海德看来，是和谐的终极形式。在儒学之中，这被称作“仁”。仁者是那些心系和谐的人，他们的日常生活中处处体现了和谐。

8 那么，还有一个问题：只有儒学是否足矣？一个人可否通过寻求一种另外的方式过上令人满意的健康生活呢？我个人的愿望是：那些自诩为基督徒、佛教徒、犹太教徒和穆斯林教徒的人能逐渐学习更多的儒家智慧。现行的儒家思想可以充实其他文化。世界上很多地区仍有众多的人很想成为好人，他们发现自己热爱和谐，他们在平常生活中找寻各种意义——在家庭、友谊和社会服务中——找寻足以让他们过上满意生活的意义。一些人称之为精神的（追求）。只要称作好人便足矣。

9 中国以及其他东亚国家现行的儒学思想能帮助全世界的人们学会怎样成为一个好人。它能帮助不同文化的人们。随着美国步入新世纪，我们欢迎，确切地说庆贺，我们在东亚的朋友们那里找到了现行的儒家思想。每当我们发现自己在生活中能尊重他人之时；每当我们与世界分享美好以遂天意之时；每当我们选择简单而谦恭的生活方式，不在乎他人关注之时，我们就是在以自己的方式过上儒家生活。美便在其中。