HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 2: Confucius
Section 6: 禮 *Li*[rituals] as a Metaphor for Social Conventions

- David Lewis - *Convention: A Philosophical Study*, Harvard University Press 1969
- A convention is a regular solution to a coordination problem, a way of coordinating our joint behavior for mutual benefit
- A pattern of behavior whose maintenance is more important to us than the temporary benefit we might derive from ad hoc deviations
- 禮 *Li*[ritual] create a complex set of interrelated expectations – A university's 'lecture' times and locations are an example. We all benefit from the stability in expectations and planning established conventions make possible
- This regularity, although arbitrary (not the *absolutely* right solution) is *stable*
- Each of us has personal reasons and all of us moral reasons to respect and perform in accord with this regularity. Each realizes that others expect and depend on these mutual expectations, so it is rational for each of us to conform to it—even when better coordination solutions exist
- The expectations are made legitimate by the existence of the convention
- And this makes conforming to the regularity morally correct
- Conventional morality v. Western morality based on the supernatural
    - Laws passed by God should be the best of all logically possible coordination strategies
    - Conventional morality is a non-perfect humanly created historically conditioned coordination strategy that *could* be improved
    - But we are morally warranted in abiding with it
    - Humans are convention-following animals (but perhaps not the only ones?)