HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 2: Confucius
Section 9: Rectifying Names (Part Two)

- 正名 *zheng-ming*[rectify names] passage acknowledges a dependence on interpretation that infects ritual as much as punishment codes
- Confucius' way of analysing disagreements:
  - Story of 直 *zhi*[upright] Gong reporting his father to the authorities over stealing a sheep
  - Confucius' response is to look at the language issue: My people use 直 *zhi*[upright] differently
  - Chinese understanding of disagreement tends to focus on the use of a word
- The abortion debate
  - In the west, we understand the pro-life v. pro-choice forces as having different values
  - The 正名 *zheng-ming*[rectify names] way of approaching the debate is to see the values as the same, everybody agrees we should not kill an innocent person
  - The disagreement hinges on whether a fetus should have the normative status of an innocent person or that of a 'not-yet' person
  - In the *Analects*' approach, it's a 正名 *zheng-ming*[rectify names] puzzle
- So how do we decide whether a fetus is a person or not?
- Confucius' passage doesn't give us much of a solution. He simply says "the sage is careful in his use of words." This suggests that the rectifying is done in the same way we learn language in the first place, by modeling and exemplifying correct use
- In the West *and* in China, attempts to persuade others may turn to appeals to an *intuition* about concrete cases