HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 2: Confucius
Section 3: The Educational Role of the Father and the Ruler

- The natural role of hierarchy is transmission of the norms through *education*
- People learn in these role relationships, with the father-son relationship as a paradigm
- In the father-son relationship you learn behavior, performance, attitude, moral character
- This training has two linked stages
    - The son learns [for the future] how to be a father
    - The son also learns by participation now how to be a son
- In the practice of your present role you are preparing for future related roles
- Normativity lies in behavior appropriate to these roles: the 禮 *li*[ritual]
- The roots of your morality are learned in familial and other social structures
- The Master said, "While a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial." Analects 1.11
- Meng Yi asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "It is not being disobedient." Soon after, as Fan Chi was driving him, the Master told him, saying, "Meng-sun asked me what filial piety was, and I answered him, - 'not being disobedient.'" Fan Chi said, "What did you mean?" The Master replied, "That parents, when alive, be served according to 禮 *li*[ritual]; that, when dead, they should be buried according to 禮 *li*[ritual]; and that they should be sacrificed to according to 禮 *li*[ritual]." Analects 2.5
- This is like a historical version of the Shang ancestor veneration in the afterlife
- The ruler's role, like the father's, is *educational* and consists in correct role performance

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- Plato's 'Philosopher King' - needed to know moral laws to know how to pass correct public laws and control behavior through judgment & punishment
- Confucius' ruler practices 'no-action' ruling, he simply performs his role perfectly, e.g. facing south in the ceremony
- He simply exemplifies virtuosity at his role
- This is why 天 *tiān*[natural] 命 *ming*[identity/role] is linked to 德 *de*[virtuosity]
- The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it." *Analects* 2.1
- Confucius replied, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it." Analects 12.19
- The Master said, "May not Shun be instanced as having governed efficiently without exertion? What did he do? He did nothing but gravely and reverently occupy his royal seat." Analects 15.5
- Behind Confucius' conception of social morality lie both *desert* AND *result.* The result (an orderly society) is a goal achieved by putting in place people who have the 德 *dé*[virtuosity] for the role (merit or desert)