HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

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

- Two counter arguments against punishment:
  - Moral psychology
  - Interpretive argument not proposed by Confucius himself but other passages hint at the problem of interpretation—including this one
- Analects 13:3 - a probably late passage that deals with problems of interpretation
  - Some skepticism that after Confucius, but probably all of the *Analects* are after Confucius
  - Distinctive style and structure - long, with a clear, logical argument
  - The argument is *neutral* about punishment
  - The argument implies that interpretation presents the same problems to 禮 *li*[ritual] that it does for punishment codes
  - We can be agnostic as to whether Confucius wrote the passage or not; it is a response to a serious problem with any ritual and role based ethical system
- The passage addresses the importance of 正名 *zheng-ming*[rectify names]
- Zilu, one of Confucius' students asks: if you were appointed to administration, what would you do first?
- Confucius replies: The first thing I would do is rectify names
  - If names are not correct, then language cannot flow... (a water metaphor)
  - 事 *shì*[business] = social matters (things that exist because humans have a social practice such as banking, contracts, marriage, jobs) vs. 物 *wù*[natural-kinds] (things that would exist and be what they are without humans, e.g., rocks, water, trees horses)

- Then social affairs (事) cannot be completed…
- Then 禮 *li*[ritual] and 樂 *lè/yuè*[entertainment:music] cannot flourish…
- Then punishments cannot be on target…
- What is the inference from ritual and music to punishment? - Possibly an interpolation from legalist inspired Confucians
- If punishments are not on target, the people cannot know how to move hand or foot –the conclusion could as plausibly have followed straight on from ritual and dancing
- Thus, 禮 *li*[ritual] normativity implies language normativity—there are social *dào*s of language use