# HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

**Week 2: Confucius**
**Section 11: Summary**

- We've not theorized much about Confucius' normative theory
- Our focus here has been on his metaethics and suggestions of his moral psychology
- Looking at Confucius' conception of the source of normativity – we saw him combine the Zhou Mandate of Heaven 天 *tiān*[natural] 命 *ming*[identity/role] and combine it with a social theory of respect for ancestors
- To produce a named-role version of social-historical, inherited normativity—Confucian social humanism
- Confucius finds the 道 *dào*[path] in this social structure consisting of a hierarchy of named role with practiced and transmitted patterns of behavior of the roles—the 禮*li*[ritual]
- Confucius finds the basic norms of behavior in the elegant performance of these social-historical roles
- Social hierarchies are *natural* for humans and extend through time—to our ancestors. Though gone, their legacy lives with us as a *natural* history of their practice
- We respect them "as if" they were here—but we do not need to commit to their continued existence in an afterlife to do so
- We will discuss developments in Confucian moral psychology, metaethical and normative theory in later lectures
- Confucius did give a more comprehensive sociological normative theory based on the Zhou political theory
    - Talking about the educational role 'the higher roles' play

  - The hierarchy instills moral character in those in lower roles, thus training them for ascension to leadership
  - It considers both *desert* (you're in the role because you're the best person to play it) and *future consequences* (it leads to the best overall outcome)
- Desired outcome - the correct and beautiful, humanly fulfilling performance of 禮 *li*[ritual] – social ritual (convention) is the normative *dào*
- Ritual is a plausible extension of the *dào* metaphor
- And it, in turn, becomes a metaphor for social conventions in general
- Social conventions are non-optimal but stable solutions to coordination problems
- A correct shared performance of in a social symphony on traditional themes
- Confucius opposes punishment because it is not a training mechanism—and makes people focus on avoidance rather than performance and for the purpose of self-protection
- Interpretive objection to punishment - the interpretation of fixed codes invites argumentativeness and undermines *personal* authority
- Confucius focuses on training so performance of a discourse *dào* is rectified: names match behavior
- In the *Analects* passages emphasizing 仁 *ren*[humanity] , we see the beginning of what will be the dominant way Confucians solve the problems with this view – appeal to intuition
- However, following intuition comes with a threat - if the intuition is sufficient to solve the interpretation problem, it must be powerful and accurate enough to make studying 禮 *li*[ritual] unnecessary