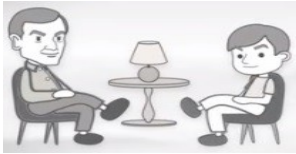


## 2.3 The educational role of father and ruler

For Confucius, the function of hierarchical role relationships is **education**.



The perfect example of this is the **father-son relationship**. We naturally emulate our parents, e.g., a child may even mimic his father's gesture of crossing his legs. A child doesn't just learn precepts from his parents, but also behaviors, attitudes, his whole **character**. Furthermore, he learns not just **how to play his own role** (how to be a son) but **how to play the other's role** (how to be a father).

Nor does the father-son relationship end when the father dies; the relationship of respect is maintained by the son continuing to act in appropriate ways after his father's death.

子曰：「父在，觀其志；父沒，觀其行；三無改於父之道，可謂孝矣。」

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, trans. James Legge)

For Confucius, a person's **morality** is rooted in what he learns when playing his **role** in the **higher-lower relationships** that form the structure of society.



The role of the **ruler**, like that of the father, is also **educational**. Ideally the ruler ought to be a **sage**. This may sound rather like **Plato**, who thinks that rulers should be philosopher-kings, wise enough to enact the right laws and control everyone else. But the Confucian sage-ruler doesn't control society with force; he acts as a model. He rules with 無為 **wú wéi** (no-action); he rules by modeling his own 德 **dé** (virtuosity).



子曰：「為政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而眾星共之。」

The Master said, "He who governs with virtuosity may be compared to the north polar star. It keeps its place and all the stars turn around it."

(Analects 2:1, trans. James Legge)

季康子問政於孔子曰：「如殺無道，以就有道，何如？」孔子對曰：「子為政，焉用殺？子欲善，而民善矣。君子之德風，小人之德草。草上之風，必偃。」

Master Ji Kang asked Confucius about governing, saying, "What do you say to killing those lacking dao for the sake of those having it?" Confucius replied, "Sir, in governing, why should you use killing at all? If you desire being good, the people will be good. The aristocrat's virtuosity is like the wind and the little peoples' virtuosity is the grass. The wind over the grass bends it." (Analects 12:19, trans. modified from James Legge)

Recall the distinction made in lecture 1.6 between **consequentialism**, which focuses on the **results** that are brought about, and **deontology**, which has a retrospective concern with **desert** and punishment.

Confucius's conception of morality has elements of **both**: both result *and* desert matter. The **result** of an orderly society is achieved by placing people in roles they **deserve** because of their 德 **dé** (virtuosity).