

2.2. Confucius and ancestor veneration

For Confucius (孔子 Kǒngzi) in particular, the **patterns of relationships** and **patterns of behavior** that attach to named roles are central to **ethics** and **morality**. Confucius's blend of normativity places more emphasis on 人 rén (humanity) than 天 tiān (natural), hence we identify Confucianism as **humanistic**.



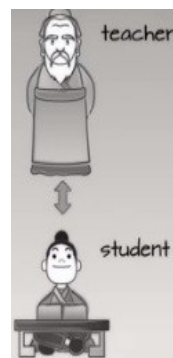
Confucius makes the Shang notion of **ancestor veneration** central to his conception of normativity. Recall that for the Shang, **family authority** was the basis for **legitimacy**. However, unlike the Shang, Confucius did not rely on the existence of an **afterlife**. Rather, he saw venerating our ancestors as being about the continued relationship of **respect** and **responsibility** towards those who have gone before us in the historical hierarchy.

The basic relationship that Confucius builds on is the **father-son relationship**. You naturally **respect** your father, and your father naturally becomes your **moral guide**. So the father-son relationship is used as a model for the other relationships found in society between the **higher** and the **lower**, such as between:

Older brother and younger brother



Teacher and student



Ruler and minister



Given this emphasis on familial relationships, for Confucius, 孝 xiào (filial piety, respect for parents and older siblings) is the basis for the growth of **morality**.

There is an element of 天 tiān (nature) in Confucius insofar as he understands these basic, father-son, older-younger roles and structures that we inhabit to be **fixed by nature**, rather than by convention or some other human source.