Role Ethics and The Family:

CONFUCIANISM
Confucius/ Kǒng Fūzǐ/ Kung Fu-tzu

Traditionally, it is held that Confucius (Latinized version of his name) lived from around 551 BCE to 479 BCE (compare to Buddha 563-484BCE and Lao tzu 604-520BCE). He began his working life as a lowly administrator in the Court of Lu. After the death of his mother, he retired for the mandatory 1 year mourning period, resigning this job. After this period, at the age of 22 he opened up his own school (much like Plato’s Academy). When the nobles of the Court of Lu sent their own sons to study with him he gained a measure of fame. He wanted to be a successful administrator in public office (of the Zhou Civilization in the Shantung Province). Instead he became known as the "First Teacher" of China.
Mencius/ Mèng Zǐ/ Meng Tzu

- Mencius (372 – 289 BCE), also known by his birth name Meng Ke or Ko, was born in the State of Zou, now forming the territory of the county-level city of Zoucheng; originally Zouxian), Shandong province, only thirty kilometers (eighteen miles) south of Qufu, Confucius' birthplace.

He was an itinerant Chinese philosopher and sage, and one of the principal interpreters of Confucianism. Supposedly, he was a pupil of Confucius' grandson, Zisi. Like Confucius, according to legend, he travelled China for forty years to offer advice to rulers for reform. During the Warring States Period (403–221 BCE), Mencius served as an official and scholar at the Jixia Academy in the State of Qi (1046 BCE to 221 BCE) from 319 to 312 BCE.

He expressed his filial devotion when he took an absence of three years from his official duties for Qi to mourn his mother’s death. Disappointed at his failure to effect changes in his contemporary world, he retired from public life.
The Period of Warring States

During their lives, China was in a period of enormous turmoil and incredible violence - the method of civil change was often conquest with wholesale murder of the conquered victims. This period has been called the **Period of Warring States** but it has also been called the **Period of a Hundred Philosophers**. This period saw the conquering of the Shang dynasty by the Zhou (which ended around 255 BCE). “Feudal warfare, ravaging armies, brutal conquest, shifting boundaries, ruined crops and villages – such was the general picture.” (Bresnan, Awakening)
In Response to War: Moral Order

- Confucians sought to provide a more peaceful and harmonious life for the subjects based on a reinterpretation of traditional values combined with an emphasis on natural order.
- This is "less a religion than a formal ethic defining personal relationships in an ideal moral order." (Koller, Asian Philosophies)
“Humanity is fidelity to virtue.”

- Everyone is an indispensable link in the endless chain of humanity binding all together in society and family:

- "For Confucius, the Way manifests itself as a golden mean. It opens a path between punctiliousness and irregularity, between submissiveness and independence. Most situations are governed by a protocol that will produce graceful interactions if it is followed wholeheartedly. The task of the gentleman is to know that protocol, intuit how it applies in particular cases, and have the discipline to carry it out."

"In summary, then, the hallmarks of the original Confucians were a reliance on ancient models, a concern for the golden mean between externalism and internalism, a stress on filial piety, and a deep respect for the ruler's connection with heaven. These socially oriented thinkers emphasized breeding, grace and public service. Their goal was harmony and balance through a hierarchal social order. They gave little attention to the rights of peasants or women, but they did prize ethical integrity, compassion, and learning. Against the blood and violence of their times, they called for a rule through moral force.

Three core texts of Confucianism are

• the *Analects*,
• the *Mencius* and
• the *Biography of Sima Quian*.

Traditionally, the *Analects* have been credited to Confucius but recently many have argued that in fact Mencius wrote the first two of these three core texts.
Four Important Elements of Confucianism:

I. Ancestral Worship

Ancestral Worship is important for the following three reasons:

1. knowing and honoring one's ancestors provides a grounding - a sense of identity and stability

2. it unifies the extended family - and relatedly (pun intended) the entire society

3. the ancestors are regarded as assets – their compiled wisdom representing the best way to go about one's business. This collective wisdom authorizes the revolution Confucius proposes under the guise of a reformation back to "traditional values" - These are the values of our ancestors - hence the whole society recognizes a common link to the past.
Four Important Elements of Confucianism:

II. The Importance of the Family

Hsaio /Showe is the Confucian virtue of filial piety and reverence for the family. In the family is found the root of society.

Family serves the following purposes:

- economic value - everyone gets financially supported - there are no throw-away generations (one nurtures the young and cherishes the elderly)

- political/social - the family is a model for all of society - it is the way discipline is maintained in a hierarchical fashion - one is well behaved as a son (obedient to the father) will become well behaved as an adult (obedient to the government)

- moral/psychological - by providing clear ground rules - one understands the need for knowing one's place and performing one's function - the rules are known because morality is taught in the family - hence one feels confident and secure.
II. The Importance of the Family:

Family Dynamics:

- The traditional Confucian family is an extended, multi-generational family, often composed of elderly, working parents and children. Accordingly, each generation has duties and obligations to the next.

- The Elderly – provide guidance and wisdom for the family – Confucius wrote that one of the key measures of a good society was how they nurtured and cherished their elderly.

- The Parents – give nurturing to the elderly and the children, respect and obey the elderly and provide discipline and model proper behavior for the children.

- The Children - Children are seen as “practicing adults” learning how to become useful in society by practicing usefulness in the society.
II. The Importance of the Family:

Lin Yutang: “On Growing Old Gracefully”

- Ideally, caring for one’s elderly parents is a joy and a blessing … for both sides of the equation.
- We owe our parents a debt of gratitude because they brought us into the world and nurtured and cared for us when we could not care for ourselves – they’ve earned their “golden years.”
- Even if our parents were not nurturing, caring for them is still an obligation we owe to ourselves and to our society.
II. The Importance of the Family:

- Lin Yutang: “On Growing Old Gracefully”

“The greatest regret a Chinese gentleman could have was the eternally lost opportunity of serving his old parents with medicine and soup on their deathbed, or not to be present when they died. For a high official in his fifties or sixties not to be able to invite his parents to come from their native village and stay with his family at the capital, ‘seeing them to bed every night and greeting them every morning,’ was to commit a moral sin of which he should be ashamed ....” (p.567)
Four Important Elements of Confucianism:

III. The Practical Needs of an Agricultural Economy

Confucius argued that without agricultural needs being placed at a very high priority, the country would not get fed and chaos would ensue - grain must be planted, harvested, stored and properly distributed - and this requires a harmonious and well ordered society - but one could not have that society unless people got fed - they are interdependent conditions.
Four Important Elements of Confucianism:

IV. The Regulation of Human Relationships:

Maintenance of social/communal harmony and peace. Human relationships must be governed by virtue and by clear hierarchies - one must know one's place, want to fulfill their obligation to their family and to their society and act in such a way that is consistent with the classic values.
Virtue/ dé / te

- Applies to the quality of one’s character
- Is associated not only with integrity but also with happiness
- Also applies to good use of power by one’s government
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

**Jen / Ren**: Human heartedness, goodness, benevolence

- It is more important to achieve *Jen* than to live, governs interpersonal feelings.

- *Jen* is the supreme ethical virtue. Without Jen, all the other virtues are meaningless - it is the intention & motivation behind one's every action.

- Confucius said that at the heart of Jen, “*It is to love men.*” (Sayings / Lun-Yu)
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

**Li** : propriety, ritual, moral norms, duty to family and to society
- there are 4 parts:
  - 1) the rectification of names (Cheng-Ming) - this involves both the idea of certain tasks associated with certain titles - "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son." (from the Analects) as well as a sense that correct speech is important in the good society - eg p.c. speech - as it directs/controls behavior and thought
  - 2) the doctrine of the mean - this is the prescriptions to avoid all excesses in one's behavior - e.g. no excessive pridefulness nor false humility.
  - 3) the 5 constant relationships - these rules govern the relationships and duties between all the members of society – ruler & subject/husband & wife/parents & children/elder brother & younger brother/friend & friend - no member of society is exempt from culpability,
  - 4) the regard for age - as noted earlier, the elderly are regarded as assets - it is very dishonorable to have one's elderly bearing burdens past their proper working years. These rules governed one’s obligations towards one's parents and grandparents.
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

Yi : righteousness, justice, duty, equity

- added by Mencius - it is the sense that certain actions must be done - or not done just because they are - or are not the right thing to do - it involves a certain degree of moral disposition, intuition & reasoned judgment.

- “...(it) is an understanding of what is proper and appropriate, not just in terms of etiquette but also in terms of whether something is reasonable and rational.” (p.542)
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

The Chun-tzu /Junzi

- In the Confucian schema, the job of the king is to “reign” not actually “rule”. (Bresnan, *Awakening*) The king is to function as the ideal role model, a symbol of human excellence. The actual job of ruling was to be performed by the *junzi*, a select group of administrators, carefully selected and trained to handle the day to day business of government. These people were to be brought up as people of unparalleled excellence, virtuous and knowledgeable about their proper role in society.

- The development of the *junzi* depended on the institution of an educational system designed to foster this sort of excellence. Hence the *junzi* would not appear overnight. These people were to be selected as children and carefully nurtured through the years, being taught by select teachers. The key focus of this education would of course be the core virtues with the goal of developing people who had the will to govern wisely and compassionately.
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

The Chun-tzu / Junzi

- Translated as a gentlemanly ideal – a role model for society - though anyone who actually claimed this status would be demonstrating that they missed the mark – as the junzi would always be aware of their own short-comings and be conscientiously working always towards improvement.

- Being excellent requires extreme moral effort - the correction of one's own imperfection is necessary to obtain mastery over one's self.
Fundamental Ethical Concepts:

Confucius on the Chun-tzu /Junzi:

- “Wealth and honor are what every man desires. But if they have been obtained in violation of moral principles they must not be kept. Poverty and humble stations are what every man dislikes. But if they can be avoided only in violation of moral principles, they must not be avoided. If a superior person departs from humanity (jen) how can he fulfill his name? A superior man never abandons humanity (jen) even for the lapse of a single meal. In moments of haste, he acts according to it. In times of difficulty or confusion, he acts according to it.” (Sayings / Lun-Yu)
Mencius on Innate Goodness:

- Mencius emphasized the goal of the *chun-tzu* (*junzi*) as the honorable or virtuous man as opposed to the good governor of Confucius.
- He argued that humans are naturally good and that the proper goal of education is to nurture and foster this inherent goodness.
- Mencius compared humans to water: "*Human nature is good just as water seeks low ground. There is no man who is not good; there is no water that does not flow downwards.*"

(Bresnan, *Awakening*)