2.5 MOHISM

Mohism is the name given to the philosophical school founded by a man named Mozi (Master Mo, his full personal name is given as Mo Di), who lived during the fifth century B.C. Mozi was the first man to offer a strong intellectual challenge to Confucianism. His followers became a highly disciplined band of men committed to certain extreme doctrines of political and ethical action. They were very influential during the Warring States period, but the school died out during the decades following the Qin conquest of 221.

We know very little about most non-Confucian Classical thinkers, and Mozi is no exception. Some sources tell us that he was a disenchanted Confucian from the state of Lu, whose early training in ritualism later made him an effective adversary to Confucian doctrines. Other texts say he was from the state of Song and do not speak of any Confucian connection, but note instead that the surname “Mo,” which means “ink mark,” is a very rare one, and may refer not to Mo Di’s family but rather to the fact that he had been subjected to “tattooing,” a punishment often meted out to criminals in the Classical era. This account interprets “Mozi” as meaning “the tattooed master.”

The notion that Mozi was a commoner who had fallen afoul of the law fits with the rhetoric of the text that he and his followers compiled: the *Mozi*, which is unstylish and even crude (this shows through even in translation). Moreover, the analogies, metaphors, and examples offered in Mozi’s book are frequently connected with the activities of the common soldier or of the members of the artisan class. At the least, we may say that it is likely that most of Mozi’s followers were commoners, perhaps principally the sons of peasants and artisans who had been drafted into the endless wars of the era.

During the Warring States period, the Mohists were organized in tight-knit paramilitary bands. They were specially trained in what we may call the arts of defensive warfare. One of the major doctrines of Mohism was that offensive warfare was evil and the cause of most of the suffering of the time. Mohists were famous for matching their actions to their beliefs, and Mohist groups made careers of racing from one area of China to another, offering their services to rulers whose states were under attack. Rulers who accepted Mohists into their service found them skilled in engineering devices designed to repel attacks on walled cities and fortresses.

Mohism’s rejection of offensive warfare was one of a set of clearly defined and argued doctrines that distinguished this cult from all others. These doctrines rested upon the belief that the good was whatever produced the greatest well-being among the people. Mohists argued that this was, indeed, the standard that Heaven used when rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, and they also claimed that the sage rulers of the distant past had used this criterion to rule effectively, rather than the ritual patterns of Confucianism.

Mohist doctrines advocated thrift in government, the elimination of extraneous ritual and music, and the enforcement of a strict political hierarchy under the ruling Son of Heaven, whom,
Mohists believed, was always selected by Heaven and in close touch with that ethereal being. Mohists were enthusiastic supporters of the belief in ghosts and spirits. They held that religious belief was essential to a well ordered society; the more cautious approach of the Confucians on the issue of the existence of the spirits they saw as socially subversive atheism.

Like Confucianism, Mohism was a type of radical conservatism. When the Mohists searched the distant past for a model for the present, they discovered not Confucian precedents of ritual rule, but a meritocracy that raised to power people who resisted the lure of personal enrichment and showed the ability to treat the masses of common people with fairness and courage. Their philosophy reflects the spirit of the warriors whom the Confucian Mencius described as models for nurturing the vital energy, or qi (we will explore this in the next section). Mohists were no respecters of high rank, but they were arduous in demanding discipline of themselves, fair treatment of others according to their deserts, and dedication to the restoration of political order under a single Son of Heaven.

What Mohists shared with Confucianism and other conservative philosophies was a faith in the bedrock foundation of Zhou political culture: social order is dependent upon the personal virtue of the ruler.

But the most dramatic and famous doctrine of Mohism, one which the Mohists viewed as the essence of their beliefs, was their doctrine of universal love. What the Mohists meant by “universal love” was this: an attitude towards all others that viewed each of them as of equal value with oneself, with no distinctions of affection made among any. Under such an imperative, an individual was charged to have no special regard for parents, spouse, or children, nor for his or her own person. The demand was to cultivate an attitude where the needs of any stranger would have as strong an impact upon you as the needs of your family or friends, and your response to that stranger would be as immediate, generous, and unreserved as it would be to your intimates. (The Mohists used the term “love” to denote a responsive sensitivity towards others, rather than in the sense of romantic love.)

The following anecdote, recorded about 250 B.C., conveys the radical emotive commitment that Mohists were viewed as making in taking the public good rather than personal feelings to be so absolute an imperative:

There was in the state of Qin a Mohist master named Fu Tun whose son murdered a man. King Hui of Qin (r. 337-311) said, “You are old, Sir, and you have no other sons. I have already ordered the officers not to execute your son. I pray that you will permit me to spare your boy.”

“The laws of the Mohists,” replied Fu Tun, “say: ‘Murderers shall die and those who inflict injury shall be maimed.’ This law prevents people from committing murder and assault. Preventing the commission of murder and assault is an act of great righteousness. Your Majesty may wish to grant me the gift of sparing the life of my son, but I cannot do other than carry out the laws of the Mohists.” And so he refused the King’s offer and his son was executed.
A son is one’s dearest personal possession. To bear to have what is dearest to one killed in order to implement righteousness – Fu Tun may indeed be termed one who acted in the interests of all. (From The Almanac of Lord Lü, 1.5)

Needless to say, non-Mohists found such radical ethical demands outlandishly incompatible with normal human psychology. But for Mohists, to value all other people as highly as one spontaneously values those within one’s private sphere was the pivot of their entire philosophy. They allowed no emotional issues to cloud their closely reasoned position that there was neither a logical nor an ethical basis for regarding some people differently from others.

Unlike almost all other types of early Chinese philosophy, Mohism exhibits a deep commitment to the power of Reason. In fact, Mohists were in some ways the only true rationalistic thinkers in Classical China (some would say in the entire history of traditional China). As you will be able to see very easily in the translation of “Universal Love” below, the Mohists argued in a rational fashion, always attempting to justify their claims through careful arguments. What is more, they clearly believed that the power of rational “proof” was so overwhelming to the intellect that it was almost inconceivable that people could fail to accept and act upon the doctrine of universal love once it was explained to them.

It is possible to argue that the greatest significance of Mohism lay not in its various explicit doctrines, but rather in the fact that through the Mohists, Chinese culture was presented with the option of making Reason the pivot of intellectual inquiry, as it was in Greece, Rome, and their later cultural descendants. Many of the fundamental differences between the cultures of China and of Western Europe are reflected in the fact that Mohism did not find an enduring audience in China, whereas the generally rationalistic approaches of Plato and Aristotle became fundamental to Western traditions.

Our main selection from the Mozi is its essay on “Universal Love.” Apart from a famously opaque group of chapters on language and logic, the Mozi, although written in a notably inelegant style of ancient Chinese, is in general not a difficult text. Some of its chapters are almost modular in form, repeating nearly verbatim rhetorical formulas over a series of sections that together show an effort (not always successful) to convey the logical force of the argument without the distraction of literary charm. The “Universal Love” chapter is an example of this repetitive yet unusually clear style. I have added to the text headers to highlight the organization of the chapter, and inserted comments to draw attention to the significance of the ideas and the rigor of rational argument.
MOZI: ON UNIVERSAL LOVE

I. The Basic Premise: Partiality as the Root of Harm

Mozi says: “It is the task of the man of ren to set himself to promote whatever brings welfare to the world and to eliminate whatever brings harm.”

Note that although the Mozi uses the Confucian term ren, its scope is narrow and it signifies little more than “benevolence.”

Now in this age what harms are the greatest? Great states attacking small ones, great families disrupting small ones, the strong coercing the weak, the many tyrannizing the few, deceivers taking advantage of the foolish, the eminent lording it over the humble: these are the harms in the world. Rulers who are ungenerous, ministers who are disloyal, fathers unkind to their children and sons unfilial towards their fathers: these too are the harms in the world. Moreover, today we see base people assaulting and injuring one another with weapons, knives, poison, fire, and water.

Now let us trace the origins of these various harms: what do they arise from? Are they due to people loving others and benefiting them? No, we must say it is not so, and that they follow from people hating others and injuring them. And what if we further clarify our terms by asking whether those who hate and injure others act according to universality or partiality? Surely, we must say: partiality. Is it not, then, this partiality in their dealings with others that ultimately gives rise to all the great harms in the world? In this way we conclude that partiality is wrong.

In this opening section, the Mohist writers support Mozi’s opening claim through strictly reasoned argument, not far distant from the style of argument that characterized early Greek philosophical writing, which was generally cast as an appeal to reason.

II. The Prescription for Change: Universality as the Formula for Goodness

Mozi says, “Whoever criticizes others must have an alternative to offer.” To criticize and yet offer no alternative is like trying to stop a flood with water or put out a fire with fire. Any defense of such conduct must certainly fail. Therefore Mozi has said, “Universality should replace partiality.”

But how can partiality be replaced with universality? If rulers were to regard the states of others as they regard their own states, who would mobilize his state to attack another’s? It would be like attacking his own. If lords were to regard the cities of others as they regard their own, then who would mobilize his city to strike another’s? It would be like
striking his own. If men were to regard the families of others as they regard their own, then
who would mobilize his family to disrupt another’s? It would be like disrupting his own.
When states and cities do not attack and strike one another and families and individuals do
not disrupt and injure one another, are these things a harm to the world or a benefit? We
must say they are a benefit!

Now let us trace the origins of these various benefits, what do they arise from? Are
they due to people hating others and trying to injure them? No, we must say it is not so, and
that they follow from people loving others and benefiting them. And what if we further
clarify our terms by asking whether those who love and benefit others act from universality
or partiality? Surely, we must say: universality. Is it not, then, this universality in their
dealings with others that ultimately gives rise to all the great benefits in the world? This is
why Mozi has said that universality is right.

[First general conclusion:] I initially said: It is the task of the man of ren to set himself to
promote whatever brings welfare to the world and to eliminate whatever brings harm. Now
I have demonstrated that universality is the source of all the great benefits of the world and
partiality is the source of all the great harms. Mozi’s statement that partiality is wrong and
universalism is right is based on this method.

Now if we were to seek to benefit the world and take universalism as our standard,
those with sharp ears and clear eyes would see and hear for others, those with strong limbs
would work for others, those with a knowledge of the Dao would strive to teach others.
Consequently those who are old and without wives and children would find means of
support and be able to live out their days, and the young and orphaned who have no parents
would find people to rely upon who would look after them as they grow.

When such benefits may be secured merely by taking universalism as our standard, I
cannot understand how the gentlemen of the world can hear this doctrine of universalism
explained and still criticize it!

The power of reason is grasped by the Mohists as by no one else in early China. To Mohists,
for whom these arguments would have seemed air tight, the force of rational proof seems to
have allowed for no doubt whatever – a habit of mind shared by many later Western thinkers,
and surely a necessary attitude for people who would wish to emulate the sacrifice of Fu
Tun.

Yet the words of gentlemen in the world who do criticize it never cease. “It may be a good
thing,” they say, “but how could it ever be put into practice?”

Good reasoners do not stop at offering positive arguments. An argument is not complete
until all objections are anticipated and refuted, and the Mozi now engages in this
sophisticated turn of reasoning.
III. The First Argument of Practicability: The Personal Level

Mozi says, “If a thing cannot be put into practice even I would criticize it. But how can there be a good thing that cannot be put into practice?”

Let us consider this from two sides. Suppose there are two men, one holding to partiality and the other to universality. The one holding to partiality would say, “How could I regard my friend as I do myself, or my friend’s father as I do my own?” Because he views his friend in this way, he will not feed him when he is hungry, clothe him when he is cold, nourish him when he is sick, or bury him when he dies. The words of the man of partiality being thus, so too are his actions.

The words of the universally minded man are not like this, nor are his actions. He will say, “I have heard that in his conduct the superior man regards his friend as he does himself and his friend’s father as he does his own father. Only if he is like this can he be a superior man.” Because he views his friend in this way, he will feed him when he is hungry, clothe him when he is cold, nourish him when he is sick, and bury him when he dies. The words of the man of universality being thus, so too are his actions.

When it comes to two such gentlemen, their words disagree and their actions are diametrically opposed.

The writers here responsibly begin to set up a hypothetical situation to test their ideas. However, in their radical commitment to the black-and-white world of reason, as they conceive it, they allow only for the most extreme positions. The Confucians, whose ethical vision this Mohist text is attacking, pictured a world in which people differentiate their treatment of others in a carefully scaled manner depending on familial relationships and other factors, such as friendship, political roles, relative need, and broad social implications.

Let us assume that both of these gentlemen are determined to keep faith with their words and to fulfill them action, so that word and deed match like the two halves of a tally, and nothing they say is not put into practice. This being so, let me pose the following question.

Suppose that we see here a broad and open plain, a vast wilderness. Donning armor and helmet we see a man about to set off to war, where the balance of life and death cannot be known – or perhaps he is an envoy, going off to distant Ba or Yue, Qi or Chu, on a mission for his lord, and whether he shall ever return is uncertain.

The style of Mohist thought is well illustrated by the abstraction of this example: the anonymous man standing in a featureless landscape. The literary setting conveys the extremity of generalization that this hypothetical thought experiment assumes.
Now let me ask, then, how such a one will deal with his family matters: the support of his parents and the care of his wife and children once he is gone. Would he entrust them to the care of a man of universality or to a man of partiality?

It seems to me that in such cases there are no fools in the world! Though a man may himself be critical of universality, he would surely entrust his family to a man of universality. Thus people criticize the doctrine of universality in words, but when put to the test in action they adopt it. Their deeds contradict their words.

I cannot understand how the gentlemen of the world can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it! Yet the words of gentlemen in the world who do criticize it never cease. “Such a principle may be practical as a basis for choosing among ordinary men,” they say, “but it cannot be used to select a ruler.”

By “select a ruler” the text does not imply a democratic notion: it refers to cases where people have a choice of states in which to settle.

The writers have now shown the practicality of universality to the degree that by means of this imaginative test, the reader who accepts all the Mohist premises must agree that those who follow universality will surely rise to positions of personal trust in society. Yet like all sects at this time, the Mohists attracted followers and patronage only to the degree that their doctrines seemed to be practical on a political level. The text now proceeds to raise its vision from the personal to the political.

IV. The Second Argument of Practicability: The Ruler

Let us consider this from two sides. Suppose that we have two rulers, one who holds to universality and the other to partiality. The ruler who holds to partiality says, “How could I regard my people as I regard myself? That would be completely to deny human nature. Our lives in the world last only an instant; they flash by like galloping horses glimpsed through a crack in the wall!”

This common proverb carries the sense of “carpe diem.”

Because he views his people in this way, such a ruler will not feed them when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, nourish them when they are sick, or bury them when they die. The words of a ruler who holds to partiality being thus, so too are his actions.

The words of the universally minded ruler are not like this, nor are his actions. He says, “I have heard that an enlightened ruler places his people first and himself last. Only if he is like this can he be an enlightened ruler.” Because he views his people in this way, he will feed them when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, nourish them when
they are sick, and bury them when they die. The words of a ruler who holds to universality being thus, so too are his actions.

Can you think of a way in which an opponent of Mohism might use the same general framework of argument to show the impracticality of the Mohist rule of universality at the level of the ruler?

When it comes to two such rulers, their words disagree and their actions are diametrically opposed. Let us assume that both of these rulers are determined to keep faith with their words and to fulfill them in action, so that word and deed match like the two halves of a tally, and nothing they say is not put into practice. This being so, let me pose the following question.

Suppose now that there is a year of plague and disease, where the people suffer from bitter hardship and starve in the cold, collapsing in ditches by the roadside to die. In times like these, which of these two types of rulers would the people choose to follow?

It seems to me that in such cases there are no fools in the world! Though a man may himself be critical of universality, he would surely follow a ruler who holds to universality. Thus people criticize the doctrine of universality in words, but when put to the test in action they adopt it. Their deeds contradict their words.

I cannot understand how the gentlemen of the world can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it! Yet the words of gentlemen in the world who do criticize it never cease. “The doctrine of universality is ren and it is righteous,” they say. “Yet how could it ever be put into practice? One could no more put it into practice than one could pick up Mt. Tai and leap over a river with it! Thus universality is merely an ideal to be longed for. How can we treat it as a real possibility?”

Having illustrated in the preceding arguments that universality will have the practical value of attracting the admiration and trust of individuals and of populations, the authors now address the issue of the impossibility of finding exemplary individuals who will sacrifice the pleasures of ordinary life in order to dedicate themselves to others so fully.

V. The Third Argument of Practicability: The Precedents of the Past

Mozi says, “As for someone picking up Mt. Tai and leaping over a river with it, from the birth of humankind until today there has never been such a one. But universal love and mutual aid were actually put into practice by four sage kings of antiquity.”

The *Mozi* is not only the first Chinese text to develop well structured arguments based on reason, it is also the first text to develop standards for measuring the success of arguments. In a different chapter of the book, the criteria for proving the validity of an argument are
clearly established: “An argument must be judged on the basis of three tests. What are the three tests? Its origin, its confirmability, and its practical applicability. How do we judge it on the basis of origins? We do so by comparing the theory with the deeds of the sage kings of antiquity. How do we judge its confirmability? We judge it on the basis of what ordinary people attest to on the basis of their eyes and ears. How do we judge its practical applicability? We judge it by observing whether it would benefit the state and the people when put into practice.”

How well do the arguments concerning universality fulfill these criteria?

How do we know these sage kings practiced universality and mutual aid? Mozi says, “I did not live in the same age that they did, nor have I personally heard their voices or seen their faces. Yet because of what has been written on bamboo and silk, engraved on metal and stone, inscribed on bowls and basins, and handed down through the ages, I know this is so.

The “Great Oath” section of the Book of Documents says, “King Wen of Zhou was like the sun and the moon, shining his bright light over the four quarters from the western lands.” This means that the universal love of King Wen for all in the world was so broad that it may be compared to the universal light of the sun or moon, which shines upon the whole world without partiality. Such was the breadth of King Wen’s universality. The universality of which Mozi speaks finds a model in King Wen.

And not only does the “Great Oath” affirm this, the “Oath of Yu” also expresses this idea. Yu charged his armies, “You ranks of troops, listen to my words! I would never dare to provoke disorder. But the disruptive ruler of the Miao people has earned Heaven’s penalty. For this reason I lead you, lords of states and the people who follow you, to punish the ruler of the Miao.” When Yu set out to punish the ruler of the Miao, it was not that he sought to increase his wealth or eminence, to win fortune or blessing, or to delight his ears and eyes. It was only that he sought to promote the welfare of the world and to eliminate what had brought harm. Such was the universality of Yu. The universality of which Mozi speaks finds a model in Yu.

The “Oath of Yu,” like the other two chapters of the Book of Documents mentioned in this chapter, was lost soon after the Classical period. We do not know what further context it provided, but certainly the use to which the authors put this fragment of text seems far-fetched when the text is viewed in isolation. The Emperor Yu was a great hero to the Mohists, rather like a patron saint. They celebrated legends that portrayed him, during the era when he calmed the primordial flood, as tirelessly laboring year after year for the greater good, wearing rustic clothes and eating simple food. The myth of the battle against the Miao people, however, is often associated with other sage kings of the distant past.

And not only is this in the “Oath of Yu”; the “Speech of Tang” also expresses this idea:
Tang was the founder of the Shang Dynasty. He is associated with the legend of a great drought. This portrait of him offering himself as a sacrificial victim in order to end the drought also appears in the Analects. It employs tropes of legend similar to those that appear in the metal-banded coffer story concerning the Duke of Zhou.

Tang said, “I dare to sacrifice a black beast and proclaim to the Heavenly Lord above: ‘Now Heaven has sent down a great drought; let it fall upon my person. I know not how I have offended the spirits high and low. If there is good, I do not dare to conceal it; if there is wrongdoing, I do not dare to pardon it: the Lord on High discerns this in his heart. If in my numerous lands any have committed crimes, let those fall upon my person. But if it I who have committed some crime, let it not fall upon those in my numerous lands.”

This shows that although Tang was honored as the Son of Heaven and possessed all the riches of the world, he did not hesitate to offer himself as a sacrifice in his prayers and entreaties to the Lord on High and to the spirits. Such was the universality of Tang. The universality of which Mozi speaks finds a model in Tang.

And not only are such words in the “Oath of Yu” and the “Speech of Tang”: the “Odes of Zhou” in the Book of Poetry also expresses these ideas. In the “Odes of Zhou” it says,

Broad, broad is the Way of the King,  
Impartial, unbiased.  
Level, level is the Way of the King,  
Unbiased, impartial.

Straight as an arrow,  
Smooth as a whetstone;  
The junzi walks along it,  
The ordinary man gazes upon it.

Thus what I have been speaking of is not some private dao. In ancient times, when King Wen and King Wu administered governance and allotted to each person his just due, they rewarded the worthy and punished the wicked without showing favoritism even towards their brothers and closest kin. Such was the universality of Kings Wen and Wu. The universality of which Mozi speaks finds a model in Kings Wen and Wu.

I cannot understand how the people of the world can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it! Yet these critics never cease. They say, “Yet if one does not strive to maximize the welfare of one’s parents, does not one do harm to one’s filial duty?”
VI. Universality as a Form of Filiality

Mozi says, “Now let us trace the way a filial son plans for the welfare of his parents. When he plans for the welfare of his parents, does he wish others to love and benefit them, or does he wish others to hate and injure them? Any reasonable account will show that he wishes others to love and benefit his parents.”

Now, if I am a filial son, what should I take as a priority to accomplish this goal? Do I make it a priority to love and benefit other people’s parents so that they will return love and benefit to mine? Or do I make it a priority to hate and injure other people’s parents so that they will love and benefit mine? Obviously, I must make it a priority to love and benefit other people’s parents so that they will return love and benefit to mine. In the end, if we wish to act as filial sons in society, isn’t it clear that we can do none other than to make a priority of loving and benefiting other people’s parents? Should we assume instead that the filial sons of the world are fools, too stupid to do what is right?

Now let us trace this further. Among the books of the former kings, in the “Greater Odes” of the Book of Poetry, it says:

No words go unanswered,
No generosity unrequited.
Toss me a peach,
I’ll repay you a plum.

The meaning is that one who loves will be loved by others and one who hates will be hated by others.

I cannot understand how the people of the world can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it! Do they believe it is too difficult to carry out? Far more difficult things have been carried out in the past.

VII. Three Tales of Difficult Changes Induced By the Attitudes of Rulers

King Ling of Chu loved slender waists. During his reign, the gentlemen of Chu ate no more than one meal a day, until they were too weak to stand without a cane for support or to walk without a wall to lean against. Now reducing one’s diet is a difficult thing to do, yet the
people did it because it pleased King Ling. So within a single generation the ways of the people can be changed because people strive to ingratiate themselves with their superiors.

King Goujian of Yue admired valor and for three years trained his soldiers and subjects to be brave. But he was not sure whether they had actually mastered bravery, so he set fire to a warship and sounded the drums to advance. The soldiers trampled one another in their haste to be in the first rank forward, and countless numbers perished in the fire and water. Had the king not ordered the drums to stop, his troops would never have stood back; the soldiers of Yue may indeed be called astonishing. Now throwing oneself into flames is a difficult thing to do, yet the soldiers did it to please the King of Yue. So within a single generation the ways of the people can be changed because people strive to ingratiate themselves with their superiors.

The non-coercive leverage that rulers possessed over their subjects fascinated Classical thinkers. A number of such stories collected around the figure of Goujian. Perhaps the cleverest comes from the Legalist text, Han Feizi:

The King of Yue was contemplating an attack on the state of Wu and wished his people to regard death lightly. One day, traveling forth with his train of followers, he spied in the road a furious frog. The King bowed slightly towards it. “What is there to admire in a frog!” wondered the followers. “He has spirit!” cried the King. In the course of the following year, over a dozen men decapitated themselves so that their heads could be presented to the King as proof of their brave spirits.

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The remainder of “On Universal Love” merely repeats previous points. There is, however, a different section of the Mozi where the doctrine of universal love is linked to another of Mohism’s most important features: its reverence for the world of spirits and most specifically for the will of Heaven. The Mohists, who pictured their adversaries the Confucians as outright atheists, argued strongly in favor of believing in spirits. Not only did they claim that spirits existed, as the beliefs of the ancient sages and the testimony of ordinary people affirmed, but they stressed that religious beliefs among the people contributed to their own welfare by making the state easier to order. To theists such as the Mohists, the presence of Heaven in everyday life was important to show, and it was essential to demonstrate that the doctrine of universal love was consistent with Heaven’s will.

The following selections from the chapter “The Will of Heaven” show the Mohist response to these issues.

**Heaven and Universality**

How can we know that Heaven loves the people of the world? Because it enlightens them universally? How do we know that it enlightens them universally? Because it possesses them universally. How do we know that it possesses them universally? Because it accepts
sacrifices from them universally. How do we know that it accepts sacrifices from them universally? Because within the four quarters, among all the people who live upon grain, there are none who do not feed their sacrificial oxen and sheep, fatten their dogs and pigs, prepare pure offerings of millet and wine, and sacrifice to the Lord on High and the spirits. Since Heaven possesses all of the people and all of the cities, how could it fail to love them? . . .

We can know that Heaven loves all the people generously for the following reasons. It sets forth one after another the sun and the moon, the stars and the constellations, all to lighten and guide the people. It orders the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter, all to regulate their lives. It sends down snow and frost, rain and dew to nourish the five grains, hemp, and silk, all so that people may enjoy the benefit of them. It stretches forth the mountains and rivers, the ravines and valley streams, and it makes known all affairs so as to ascertain the good and evil of the people. It establishes kings and lords to reward the worthy and punish the wicked, and to see to the gathering together of metal and wood, birds and beasts, the cultivation of the grains, hemp, and silk, to ensure that the people have adequate food and clothing. From ancient times to the present, this has always been so. . .

Yet this is not the only reason I know that Heaven loves the people generously. If someone kills an innocent person, then Heaven will send down misfortune upon him. Who is it that kills the innocent person. It is a man. Who is it who sends down misfortune? It is Heaven. If Heaven did not love the people generously, then what reason would it have to send down misfortune upon the murderers of innocent people? Thus I know that Heaven loves the people generously.

And there is another reason why I know that Heaven loves the people generously. There are those who, by loving and benefiting others and obeying the will of Heaven, have won Heaven’s reward. And there are those who, by hating and injuring others and disobeying the will of Heaven, have incurred Heaven’s punishment.

Who were those who, loving and benefiting others and obeying the will of Heaven, won Heaven’s reward? Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu – the sage kings of antiquity. And what did they devote themselves to? They devoted themselves to universality and shunned partiality. . .

Who were those who, hating and injuring others and disobeying the will of Heaven, incurred the punishment of Heaven? Jie, Zhòu, You and Li – the evil kings of antiquity. And what did they devote themselves to? They devoted themselves to partiality and spurned universality. . .

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KEY TERM

Universality / Universal Love

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. List the types of arguments that the Mozi makes for universality.

2. How do the Mozi’s arguments about universality reflect the concerns of people in Warring States times?

3. How do you think Confucius might have argued against the Mohists? Do you think you would be more inclined to agree with Confucian or Mohist principles?

4. How would you suppose Mohist ideas about universality and Heavenly reward and punishment were connected to the social role Mohists played as military engineers and ethical extremists?

Sources and Further Readings

No full-length study of Mohism has yet appeared in English, although A.C. Graham produced both a large scholarly analysis of the logical chapters of the text (Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science [Hong Kong & London: 1979]) and a short study attempting to reconstruct the development of the school (Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of Mo-tzu [Singapore: 1985]). The most readable translation is the partial one by Burton Watson, Mozi: Basic Writings (NY; a 2003 reissue using pinyin of a 1963 edition).