

The Ethical and Political Works of Mo Tzu translated by Yi-Pao Mei.

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Introduction

Mo Tzu probably lived between 470 and 391 BCE. After a short period as a civil servant he became a traveling philosopher like Confucius, counseling feudal lords on government and personal conduct. Unlike Confucius, he laid stress on the need for universal love, rather than love restricted to the family. He justified this in terms of the practical benefits it would bring, not least the prevention of social strife and war. However, by promoting the ideal of universal love, he essentially denied the basic tenets of Confucianism, and became a target for contumely in Confucian texts. This may have been exacerbated by the fact that Mo Tzu and his followers may have been poor; they certainly gave considerable thought to the plight of the poor in their teachings. In contrast, while the Confucians were humanists, they tended to be concerned with producing an elite.

Mo Tzu was noteworthy in his stress on the need for a proper methodology in setting up or accepting a doctrine. He argued that it should be tested by examining its basis, its verifiability, and its applicability. He used these tests to refute the doctrine of fatalism, arguing that the benefits of avoiding this doctrine would be the removal of poverty and loss of population, and the prevention of civil disorder. Along with Confucianism and Taoism, Mo Tzu's philosophy was one of the three major Chinese philosophies that had been established by the third century BCE.

Humanism

1 Mo Tzu said: The purpose of the humanist is to be found in procuring benefits for the world and eliminating its calamities.

2 But what are the benefits of the world and what its calamities?

Mo Tzu said: Mutual attacks among states, mutual usurpation among houses, mutual injuries among individuals; the lack of grace and loyalty between ruler and ruled, the lack of affection and filial piety between father and son, the lack of harmony between elder and younger brothers—these are the major calamities in the world.

Universal Love

3 But where did these calamities come from, from universal love?

Mo Tzu said: They arise out of want of universal love. At present feudal lords have learned only to love their own states and not those of others. Therefore they do not scruple about attacking other states. The heads of houses have learned only to love their own houses and not those of others. Therefore they do not scruple about usurping other houses. And individuals have learned only to love themselves and not others. Therefore they do not scruple about injuring others.

When feudal lords do not love one another there will be war on the fields. When heads of houses do not love one another they will usurp one another's power. When individuals do not love one another they will injure one another. When ruler and ruled do not love one another they will not be gracious and loyal. When father and son do not love each other they will not be affectionate and filial. When elder and younger brothers do not love each other they will not be harmonious.

When nobody in the world loves any other, naturally the strong will overpower the weak, the many will oppress the few, the wealthy will mock the poor, those honored will disdain the humble, the cunning will deceive the simple. Therefore all the calamities, strife, complaints, and hatred in the world have arisen out of want of universal love. Therefore humanists disapprove of this want.

4 Now that there is disapproval, how can we have the condition altered?

Mo Tzu said it is to be altered by the way of universal love and mutual support.

But what is the way of universal love and mutual support? Mo Tzu said: It is to esteem other countries as much as one's own, the houses of others as much as one's own, the persons of others as much as one's self.

When feudal lords love one another there will be no more war; when heads of houses love one another there will be no more mutual usurpation; when individuals love one another there will be no more mutual injury. When ruler and ruled love each other they will be gracious and loyal; when father and son love each other they will be affectionate and filial; when elder and younger brothers love each other they will be harmonious. When all the people in the world love one another, then the strong will not overpower the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the wealthy will not mock the poor, the honored will not disdain the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the simple. And it is all due to universal love that calamities, strife, complaints, and hatred are prevented from arising.

Therefore the humanist praises it.

5 But worldly people would say: "So far so good. It is of course very excellent when love becomes universal. But it is only a difficult and distant ideal."

Mo Tzu said: This is simply because the worldly people do not recognize what is to the benefit of the world, or understand what is calamitous to it. Now, to besiege a city, to fight in the fields, or to achieve a name at the cost of death—these are what men find difficult. Yet when the ruler encourages them, the multitude can do them.

In comparison, universal love and mutual aid is quite different from these. Whoever loves others is loved by others; whoever benefits others is benefited by others; whoever hates others is hated by others; whoever injures others is injured by others. Then, what difficulty is there with universal love? Only that the ruler fails to embody it in his government and the ordinary man in his conduct.

Promote the Talented

6 Mo Tzu said: Now, all the rulers desire their provinces to be wealthy, their people to be numerous, and their jurisdiction to secure order. But what they obtain is not wealth but poverty, not multitude but scarcity, not order but chaos—this is to lose what they desire and obtain what they avert. Why is this?

Mo Tzu said: This is because the rulers have failed to promote the talented and to employ the capable in their government. When the talented are numerous in the state, order will be stable; when the talented are scarce, order will be unstable. Therefore the task of the leader lies nowhere but in increasing the numbers of the talented.

7 How do we know promotion of the virtuous is the foundation of government?

When the honorable and wise run the government, the ignorant and humble remain orderly; but when the ignorant and humble run the government, the honorable and wise become rebellious. Therefore we know exaltation of the talented is the foundation of government.

The wise rulers in the past greatly emphasized the promotion of the talented and the employment of the capable. Without special consideration for relatives, for the rich and honored, or for the good-looking, they exalted and promoted the talented, enriched and honored them, and made them governors and leaders. The vicious they kept back and banished, dispossessed and degraded, and made laborers and servants. Thereupon people were all encouraged by rewards and threatened by punishments and strove with each other after virtue. Thus the talented multiplied and the vicious diminished in number. Such is promotion of the virtuous. Then the wise rulers of the past listened to their words and observed their conduct, found out their capabilities, and carefully assigned them their offices. Such is employment of the capable.

8 When rulers cannot make a coat they will employ able tailors. When they cannot kill an ox or a sheep they will employ able butchers. In these two instances they do know they should promote the talented and employ the capable for business. But when it comes to the disorder of the country and danger of the state, they do not know they should promote the talented and employ the capable for government. Rather, they would employ their

relatives, they would employ the rich without merit, and the good-looking. But as to the employment of the rich without merit and the good-looking—will these necessarily prove themselves wise and intelligent? To let these rule the country is to let the unwise and unintelligent rule the country. And disorder can then be predicted.

9 Again, to govern requires knowledge. When knowledge is not increased by ten times, while a tenfold task is assigned, it will evidently result in attending to one and neglecting nine. Though the task be attended to day and night, still it cannot be well executed. . . If the rulers now want to govern their states so that they will be permanent and unshakeable, why do they not learn that promotion of the talented is the foundation of government?

Against Offensive War

10 Suppose a man enters the orchard of another and steals the other's peaches and plums. Hearing of it, the public will condemn it; laying hold of him, and the authorities will punish him. Why? Because he injures others to profit himself. As to seizing dogs, pigs, chickens, and young pigs from another, it is even more wicked than stealing peaches and plums from his orchard. Why? Because it causes others to suffer more, and it is more inhumane and criminal.

When it comes to entering another's stable and appropriating the other's horses and oxen, it is more inhumane than to seize the dogs, pigs, chickens, and young pigs of another. Why? Because others are caused to suffer more; when others are caused to suffer more, then the act is more inhumane and criminal. Finally, as to murdering the innocent, stripping him of his clothing, dispossessing him of his spear and sword, it is even more wicked than to enter another's stable and appropriate his horses and oxen. Why? Because it causes others to suffer more; when others are caused to suffer more, then the act is more inhumane and criminal.

All the people of the world know that they should condemn these things, calling them wicked. But when it comes to a great attack by a state, they do not know that they should condemn it. On the contrary, they applaud it, calling it honorable. Can this be said to be knowing the difference between honor and wickedness?

11 The murder of one person is called wicked and incurs one death penalty. Following this argument, the murder of ten persons will be ten times as wicked and there should be ten death penalties; the murder of a hundred persons will be a hundred times as wicked and there should be a hundred death penalties. All the people of the world know that they should condemn these things, calling them wicked. But when it comes to the great wickedness of attacking other states, they do not know that they should condemn it. On the contrary, they applaud it, calling it honorable. And they are really ignorant of its being wicked. And they have written down their judgment in this matter for posterity. If they did know that it is wicked, then why would they record a false judgment to bequeath to posterity?

Now, if there were a man who, upon seeing a little blackness, should say it is black, but, upon seeing much, should say it is white, then we would think he could not tell the difference between black and white.

12 Mo Tzu saw the Grand Lord of Ch'i and said: Suppose here is a sword. When it is tried on a man's neck it severs it swiftly. Can it be said to be sharp? The Grand Lord said it would be sharp. Mo Tzu said: When it is tried on several men's necks, it severs them swiftly. Can it be said to be sharp? The Grand Lord said it would be sharp. Mo Tzu said: Of course, the sword is sharp, but who will take the curse of the deed upon him? The Grand Lord said that the sword reaped the benefit but he who tried it would be visited by the curse for the act. Mo Tzu continued: Now to capture a state, ruin an army, and destroy the people—who will be visited by the curse for this act? The Grand Lord looked down and up and deliberated, saying: "I shall be visited with the curse for this act."

13 Mo Tzu said to Prince Wen of Lu Yang: If a lord had attacked the neighboring states, killed their people, carried away their oxen and horses, grains and valuables, he might yet record it on bamboos and silk, engrave it on metal and stone, and write it up as proclamations on bells and the ceremonial vases to hand down to posterity, saying: "None possess so much as I."

Now, suppose an unscrupulous common man attacks neighboring homes, kills their inmates, and takes the dogs and hogs, food and clothing. Would he not also like to record it on bamboos and silk and write it up into proclamations on vessels and dishes to hand down to posterity, saying: "None possesses so much as I." Is this permissible?

Prince Wen of Lu Yang said: "According to what you have said, what the world takes for granted may not be right after all"

Consequences Matter

14 The Lord of Lu consulted Mo Tzu, saying: "Now I have two sons. One likes learning and the other likes dividing property for people. Which one should be crowned Prince?"

Mo Tzu said: We can't tell. It may be that they behave so just for the praise and reward of it. The fisherman's bait is not intended to feed the fish. Trapping a mouse with worms is not for the love of the mouse. I wish your Lordship would observe both their intention and their consequences.

15 P'eng Ch'ing Shengtse said: "The past can be known, the future cannot."

Mo Tzu said: Suppose your parents met with misfortune a 30 miles away, and there was just the margin of a

single day. If they could be reached they would live, if not they would die. Here are a strong wagon and an excellent horse, and here are a bad horse and a square-wheeled cart. You are allowed to choose. Which would you take?

It was replied that the excellent horse and the strong wagon would of course make for a more speedy journey. Mo Tzu said: How then is the future not knowable?

16 Upon the death of a favorite concubine of the Lord of Lu, somebody in Lu wrote an obituary for her. The Lord of Lu was pleased with it and employed the writer.

Mo Tzu heard of it and remarked: An obituary is but to narrate the ambitions of the dead. To employ the man because his obituary is pleasing is like making the wild cat pull a carriage.

Reading and Listening

17 Mo Tzu brought numerous books in his wagon drawers on his southern journey as an envoy to Wei. Hsien T'angtse saw them and was surprised. He inquired: "Sir, you have instructed Kung Shang Kuo just to consider the right and wrong of any case, and do no more. Now you, sir, bring very many books along. What can be the use for them?"

Mo Tzu said: In the past, Duke Tan of Chou read one hundred pages every morning and received seventy scholars every evening. Therefore his achievements as minister to the emperor have lasted till this day. I have no superior above me to serve, nor any farm below to attend to. How dare I neglect these books? I have heard that different ways may lead to the same end but they are not presented without deviations from one another. And the common people do not know how to place proper importance in what they hear. Hence the large number of books. When one has reviewed the ideas and has thought deeply on them, then he understands the essentials which lead to the same end. Then he no longer needs to be instructed by books. Why should you be so surprised?

How To Examine a Doctrine

18 Now, how is a doctrine to be examined?

Mo Tzu said: Some standard of judgment must be established. To expound a doctrine without regard to the standard is similar to determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel. By such a means, the distinction of right and wrong, benefit and harm, cannot be known. Therefore there must be three tests.

What are the three tests?

Mo Tzu said: Its basis, its verifiability, and its applicability. How is it to be based? It should be based on the deeds of the wise rulers of the past. How is it to be verified? It is to be verified by the senses of hearing and sight of the common people. How is it to be applied? It is to be applied by adopting it in government and observing its benefits to the country and the people.

This is what is meant by the three tests of every doctrine.

Against Fatalism

19 Mo Tzu said: At present, in governing the states the rulers all desire to have their countries wealthy, their population large, and their administration orderly. But instead of wealth they obtain poverty, instead of an increase in population they obtain a decrease, instead of order they obtain chaos. That is, they lose what they like but obtain what they dislike. What is the reason for this? It is due to the large number of fatalists among the people.

The fatalists say: "When fate decrees that a man shall be wealthy he will be wealthy; when it decrees poverty, he will be poor; when it decrees a large population, it will be large; and when it decrees a small population this will be small; if order is decreed, there will be order; if chaos, there will be chaos. If fate decrees old age, there will be old age; if untimely death, there will be untimely death. Even if a man sets himself against his fate, what is the use?"

This doctrine is promoted to the rulers at the top and keeps the people below from their work. Hence fatalists are not men who care for humanity. And their doctrines must be clearly examined.

20 Now let us look at some of the writings of the early kings. The writings of the early kings that were issued to the whole country and distributed among the people were the laws. Did any of the laws of the early kings ever say: "Blessing cannot be invoked and disaster cannot be avoided; reverence will not do any good and cruelty will not do any harm"? The standards according to which lawsuits were tried and punishments were meted out were the codes of punishment. Did any of the codes of punishment of the early kings say: "Blessing cannot be invoked and disaster cannot be avoided; reverence will not do any good and cruelty will not do any harm"? . . .

Mo Tzu said: I have not enumerated the good books of the empire completely. As they cannot be exhaustively enumerated, I limit myself to the most prominent ones . . . And try as we may, we cannot find any belief in the doctrine of fatalism. Should it not then be abandoned?

21 Now how do we know fatalism is the way of the wicked? In the past, wretched people indulged in drinking and eating and were lazy in their work. Thereupon their food and clothing became insufficient, and the danger of

hunger and cold was approaching. They did not acknowledge: "I was stupid and insolent and was not diligent at work." But they would say: "It is but my lot to be poor."

In the past, wicked rulers did not control the sensuality of their ears and eyes and the passions of their mind. They did not follow their predecessors and so they lost their country and ruined their state. They did not know that they should confess: "I am stupid and insolent and was not diligent in attending to government." But they would say: "It is but my fate to lose it."

22 If the doctrine of the fatalist were put to practice, top leaders would not attend to government and subordinates would not attend to work. If superiors do not attend to government, jurisdiction and administration will be in chaos. If the subordinates do not attend to work, wealth will not be sufficient. . . The eccentric belief in this doctrine is responsible for pernicious ideas and is the way of the wicked.

Therefore Mo Tzu said: If the people of the world really desire to have the world rich and do not want to have it poor, desire to have it orderly and dislike to have it in confusion, the doctrine of fatalism must be rejected. It is a great calamity to the world.

Source

Adapted from *The Ethical and Political Works of Mo Tzu* translated by Yi-Pao Mei. Arthur Probsthain, London, 1929.

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