



Mozi (Mo Tzu) c. 480–390 B.C.E

The Mozi

Though the *Analecets* of Confucius mark the beginning of the “classical period” of Chinese philosophy, many consider Mozi the first true philosopher in ancient China. Whereas the *Analecets* consist of the scattered sayings attributed to Confucius, it is in the *Mozi* that we first encounter any real philosophical argument. Though he may have studied with the followers of Confucius in his youth, Mozi attacks Confucius and the Confucians and argues for a different *dao* or way of governing the state. In his own time, the Mohist school founded by Mozi rivaled that of the Confucians. As Mozi was not of the *literati* class as was Confucius, but rather of the lower class knights, skilled in the technical arts of warfare, it is not surprising that the main thrust of Mozi’s *dao* was practicality. As the way for Mozi amounted to what is practical, he challenged the Confucian emphasis on the elaborate ceremonies and rites that constitute the *li*. His most original contribution was the notion of *jian’ ai*, “universal love” or “impartial caring.” What follows here is Burton Watson’s introduction to his translation of the *Mo-Tzu* and then one chapter, “Against Confucians” which was not included in our reader.

Almost nothing is known about the life of Mo Ti, or Master Mo, the founder of the Mo-ist school of philosophy. A number of anecdotes in which he figures are found in the *Mo Tzu*, the book compiled by his disciples to preserve the teachings of their master, and other late Chou and early Han works contain scattered references to him and his school. But they tell us little about the man himself. He seems to have lived some time between the death of Confucius in 479 B.C. and the birth of Mencius in 372 B.C., flourishing probably in the latter half of the fifth century B.C. He is identified by some writers as a native of the state of Sung, by others as a native of Lu, the birthplace of Confucius. The *Huzi-nan Tzu* (ch. 21), a work of the second century B.C., says that he first studied under the scholars of the Confucian school (though in later years he bitterly attacked the Confucians), and certainly the frequency with which he quotes from the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents* would seem to indicate that at some point he received thorough instruction in these ancient texts. Like Confucius and Mencius, he apparently traveled a good deal, visiting one after another of the feudal rulers of the time in an attempt to gain a hearing for his ideas, and we are told that for a while he served as a high minister in the state of Sung. He was particularly anxious to spread his doctrine of universal love (*Chien ai/Jian’ ai*) and to persuade the rulers of his day to cease their incessant attacks upon each other. The *Mo Tzu* (sec. 50), for example, relates that, when he heard that Ch’u was planning an attack on Sung, he walked for ten days and ten nights to reach the court of Ch’u, where he succeeded in persuading the ruler to call off the expedition.

Mo Tzu and his followers believed that such attacks could be stopped not only by preaching sermons on universal love, but by strengthening the defenses of vulnerable states so as to diminish the chances of a profitable victory for aggressors. Thus they hastened to the aid of besieged states, and in time became experts on methods of warfare. They formed close-knit, disciplined bands (the school was said to have split into three groups after Mo Tzu’s death), headed by an “elder” whose word was law and who, when death drew near, selected his successor from among the group. Later followers of the school

also took up the study of logic, though perhaps, as Arthur Waley has suggested, this was less from any intrinsic interest in the subject than from a desire “to arm themselves against modernist attack.”¹

The *Mo Tzu*, a work in fifteen chapters and seventy-one sections, of which eighteen are now lost, reflects these interests of the later Mo-ist school, containing a number of sections on logic and military science. Of more importance in the history of Chinese thought, however, are the sections which expound the political and ethical ideas of Mo Tzu himself, and it is from these sections that the excerpts translated here have been selected.

The sections chosen deal with eleven topics, each topic being stated in the title of the section. Each section is divided into three subsections except the last, that entitled “Against Confucians,” which is divided into two. Over the centuries, however, some of these subsections have been lost, so that only six of the eleven sections are complete today. The subsections within each section often differ in wording, order of ideas, and even slightly in content. But on the whole they resemble each other so closely that they appear to be no more than slightly different versions of a single lecture or sermon. As stated above, the Mo-ist school was said to have split into three groups after the death of its founder, and scholars have surmised that the three treatments of each topic may represent the doctrines of Mo Tzu as they were handed down in each of the three groups. In the translation I have, in order to avoid repetition, in most cases translated only the subsection which seemed to contain the most interesting and complete exposition of each topic, though in a few cases I have translated two subsections dealing with a single topic. All but the last section contain frequent uses of the formula “Master Mo Tzu said,” which would seem to indicate that they were written down not by Mo Tzu himself but by his disciples, though it is not altogether impossible that Mo Tzu wrote some of them himself, and that the phrase was added later by redactors.

Before discussing the specific doctrines expounded in the portion of the work presented here, I wish to say a word about Mo Tzu’s method of argumentation. In the section entitled “Against fatalism,” Mo Tzu lists three “tests” or criteria which are to be used to determine the validity of any theory:

1) its origin, by which he means whether or not it conforms with what we know of the practices of the sage kings of antiquity; 2) its validity, i.e., whether or not it conforms with what we know from the evidence of the senses; 3) its applicability, i.e., whether, when put into practice, it will bring benefit to the state and the people. Though Mo Tzu does not always employ all three in each case, these are the principal criteria upon which he bases his arguments.

The modern reader will probably experience the greatest difficulty in accepting the pertinence of Mo Tzu’s first criterion. All of us today tend to be skeptical of “what history proves,” since we have seen history cited to prove so many disparate and even contradictory assertions. Moreover the “history” which Mo Tzu cites to prove his arguments is often, even to the eye of the nonspecialist, patently no more than legend and myth. We must remember, however, that in Mo Tzu’s day, so far as we can gather, the majority of educated Chinese accepted without question the following two assumptions: 1) that, at certain periods in the past, enlightened rulers had appeared in China to order the nation and raise Chinese society to a level of peace, prosperity, and moral vigor unparalleled in later days; 2) that, in spite of the paucity of reliable accounts, it was still possible to discover, mainly through the records contained in the *Book of Odes* and *Book of Documents*, how these rulers had acted and why—that is, to determine “the way of the ancient sage kings”—and to attempt to put it into practice in the present age. The appeal to the example of antiquity, which Mo Tzu so often uses to clinch his argument, therefore carried enormous weight in his day, and continued to do so in Chinese philosophy down to the present century. By making such an appeal, he was following the approved practice of the thinkers of his age, and we may suppose

¹ Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1934), p. 65.

that, if his listeners accepted the validity of his account of antiquity, they must have felt strongly compelled to accept his conclusions.

The second criterion, the appeal to the evidence of the senses, he uses much less frequently, and then often with disastrous results, as when he argues for the existence of ghosts and spirits on the basis of the fact that so many people have reportedly seen and heard them.

His third criterion, that of practicability, needs no comment, since it is as vital a part of argumentative writing today as it was in Mo Tzu's time.

The eleven sections representing the basic doctrines of Mo Tzu are entitled: "Honoring the Worthy," "Identifying with One's Superior," "Universal Love," "Against Offensive Warfare," "Moderation in Expenditures," "Moderation in Funerals," "The Will of Heaven," "Explaining Ghosts," "Against Music," "Against Fatalism," and "Against Confucians."

As will be noticed, Mo Tzu was "agin" quite a number of things, and this fact provides a valuable clue to his personality and the character of his thought. He seems to have been a passionately sincere but rather dour and unimaginative man who, observing the social and moral ills of his time and the suffering which they brought to so many of the common people, felt personally called upon to attempt a cure. One way of accomplishing his aim, he believed, was to attack the abuses of the feudal aristocrats and literati. So deep is his compassion for the common people, and so outspoken his criticisms of their rulers, that some scholars have recently been led to speculate that Mo, which means "tattoo," may not be a surname at all, but an appellation indicating that Master Mo was an ex-convict who had undergone the punishment of being tattooed, and flouted the fact in the face of society by adopting the name of his penalty. This suggestion, interesting as it is, seems highly dubious, for, no matter how great his compassion for the common people may have been, his teachings were meant primarily for the ears of the rulers, and if he hoped to gain a hearing among them he would hardly have proclaimed himself a breaker of their laws. If Mo is not a surname, it is probably an appellation adopted by Mo Tzu, or given to him by his contemporaries, the meaning of which is now lost.

It is true, however, that Mo Tzu and his followers seem to have taken a far sterner and less compromising attitude toward the ruling class of the time and its foibles than did the members of the other philosophical schools. The Mo-ists condemned the music, dances, and luxurious living of the aristocracy because such pastimes taxed the wealth and energy of the common people and added nothing to the material welfare of the nation. (They failed to note the benefit which such pastimes provided for the class of merchants, artisans, entertainers, and servants who catered to such tastes, since for the Mo-ists, as for almost all early Chinese thinkers, the only common people who deserved consideration were the farmers.) They denounced offensive warfare for the same reasons, because it was a burden and an expense to the people and provided little in the way of material benefit, and they likewise condemned elaborate funerals and all other "unnecessary" expenditures. They attacked fatalistic thinking because they wanted men to believe that wealth and good fortune came only in response to virtuous deeds, and opposed the Confucian scholars because Confucianism taught such fatalistic doctrines and encouraged music and elaborate funeral rites.

Such is the negative side of Mo Tzu's thought, a listing of the ideas and practices which he believed must be abandoned before society could be restored to peace and order. On the positive side, the first principle which he enunciates is that called "honoring the worthy"—the duty of rulers to seek out men of wisdom and virtue and employ them in their governments. This would seem to be a reasonable and innocuous enough doctrine. By Mo Tzu's time, the right of certain aristocratic families to maintain hereditary possession of ministerial posts in the feudal governments had already been seriously challenged, and many rulers were doing just what Mo Tzu recommended—surrounding themselves with men chosen from the lower aristocracy or the common people who would be less encumbered by family ties and feel a greater personal devotion to the ruler who had promoted them. And no other philosophical

school could be expected to take exception to Mo Tzu's doctrine, since each would no doubt interpret "worthy men" to mean "our party"—except perhaps the Taoists and farmer-recluses, who professed not to be interested in acquiring government posts anyway. Mo Tzu may have been among the first to give clear and unequivocal expression to this ideal, which became a commonplace in Chinese political thought. But the growing conviction that character and ability rather than birth alone make the man was very much in the air at the time, and had already been stated by Confucius.

Mo Tzu's second principle, "identifying with one's superior," is likewise less controversial than it may appear to modern readers in the West. There is a very strong strain of authoritarianism in early Chinese philosophy. Independence of thought and action, for the lower classes at least, is a rarely expressed concept in the works of the period—the only example that comes to mind is Confucius' dictum: "The commander of the forces of a large state may be carried off, but the will of even the common man cannot be taken from him" (*Analects* IX, 25). The Taoists, it is true, talk much of freedom of thought and action, but it is a freedom which ignores or transcends the social order, not one that functions effectively within it. The concept of the hierarchical social order itself, the neat pyramid of classes and functionaries topped by the Son of Heaven, was an ideal that apparently no thinker dreamed of challenging. Therefore when Mo Tzu urges that each group in society must accept its standards of judgment and take orders from the group above it, he is expressing an assumption common to Mo-ists, Confucians, and, later, Legalists alike. Advice could, and indeed should, flow freely upward in the hierarchy. But decisions, in normal times at least, come only from above. Each individual and group in society, if he or it goes morally awry, may thus be checked and corrected by the group above. (Needless to say, Chinese society did not always function in this way, which explains why Mo Tzu and others spent so much time expounding this ideal.)

But what happens if the man at the very top goes awry? The Confucians believed that in that case, and in that case alone, the normal process may be reversed and a new leader may rise up from the lower ranks to replace the man at the top who has, by his misrule, disqualified himself for the position he holds. The new leader is able to do this because of his superior virtue, which wins for him both the support of society and the sanction of Heaven. Mo Tzu recognizes the same process, but pays less attention to the leader himself, who is only an agent of divine retribution, than to the power directing the process, the supernatural power of Heaven and the spirits.

Which brings us to Mo Tzu's religious views. He asserts that nature spirits and the ghosts of the dead exist, that they take cognizance of all human activities, and that they have the power to reward or punish any individual for his deeds. Heading the hierarchy of the supernatural world he envisions a deity called God, the Lord on High, or Heaven, who creates all beings, loves all beings, and desires their welfare, working towards that end through the earthly representatives of the deity, the Son of Heaven and his officers. There is nothing novel about such views; they are striking only as a reaffirmation of traditional religious beliefs. If we turn to the *Odes* and *Documents*, we will find such assumptions underlying almost every line, while the mass of early historical legends preserved in the *Tso chuan* abounds in stories of spirits who returned from the land of the dead to take personal revenge upon their enemies. Yet the very insistence with which Mo Tzu proclaims these beliefs indicates that they had lost, or were losing, their hold on the men of his generation, at least those of the ruling class, the audience to which his words are addressed. The Confucians, recognizing and even encouraging this trend toward skepticism and agnosticism, worked to salvage and revitalize the old religious rites and forms by imbuing them with new interpretations that were more in keeping with the changing intellectual climate of the time. Mo Tzu, on the other hand, attacked the trend of the times head on, and attempted to drag men back to the simple, pietistic, and fear-ridden faith of antiquity. For only through such a faith, he believed, could men be frightened into abandoning their evil ways and persuaded to love and benefit one another as Heaven desired them to.

The doctrine of universal love is the most famous and original of Mo Tzu's contributions to Chinese thought. We have already noted the negative side of it in his condemnations of offensive warfare, condemnations which could just as well have been made by thinkers of the Confucian or Taoist schools. But Mo Tzu alone of all Chinese thinkers was not content merely to condemn acts that are harmful to others. He went a step further to proclaim that men should actually love the members of other families and states in the same way that they love the members of their own family and state, for all are equally the creatures and people of God.



Jian'ai
(Chien ai)

This is a noble and original ideal indeed, especially when we consider the fierce strife and hatred that characterized the society of Mo Tzu's time. Here at last is a man who dared to look beyond the hierarchical and geographical divisions of feudal society to a view of all mankind united in fellowship and love. When we examine the arguments which Mo Tzu puts forward to support such an ideal, however, we can understand, at least in part, why it was for so many centuries neglected or even scoffed at by the Chinese.

In the form of an imaginary dialogue, Mo Tzu presents the objections which he believes his opponents will raise to his doctrine of universal love, and answers them one by one. In brief summary, this is how his argument runs:

Q. What good is such a doctrine?

A. It will bring the greatest benefit to the largest number of people.

Q. Can it be put into practice?

A. Yes. This is proved by the fact that it actually was practiced by the sage kings of antiquity.

Q. How is it to be put into practice?

A. The rulers can be persuaded of its usefulness, and they in turn will enforce it among the people by laws and coercion.

The society of Mo Tzu's day, with its local prides and strong sense of family solidarity, could not be expected to respond with much sympathy to such a call for universal altruism and love. The need for a more pious and fearful regard for the spirits, for frugal living, for cessation of costly aggressive warfare—these were ideals all men could comprehend, though they might not agree with them. But a doctrine as novel as that of universal love was bound to be met with bafflement and ridicule. It alone among Mo Tzu's ideas does not seem to have been a commonplace of the thought of his time, or to hark back to older beliefs of ancient Chinese society. On the contrary it is a startling, original, and even revolutionary concept, and we might expect that Mo Tzu, when putting it forward, would attempt to support it with arguments that are as lofty and challenging as the ideal itself, to clothe it with some sort of poetry or rhetoric that would help the listener to believe that it was in fact attainable, or at least worth striving for. And yet, as we have seen, he defends it in exactly the same pedestrian and uninspired way in which he defends every other doctrine he preaches—by an appeal to material benefit, to authoritarianism, and to the dubious account of an ancient golden age. Perhaps he felt that only such (in his eyes) hardheaded and practical arguments could mask the visionary idealism of the doctrine itself and make it palatable to his hearers. Yet nowhere is the reader likely to feel more strongly the contrast, characteristic of Mo Tzu's thought as a whole, between the essential loftiness of his doctrines, and the plodding, matter-of-fact, and (in modern eyes) often painfully inadequate arguments by which he supports them. Moreover, the arguments delimit and qualify the ideals to such an extent that they end by dragging them down to their own level of cautious utilitarianism, and piety, non-aggression, and universal love become no more than judicious policies of government.

These, then, are the principal doctrines of Mo Tzu and his followers. And how did such doctrines fare in the world of ancient China? It is customary to cite in answer the alarmed statement of Mencius, recorded in *Mencius* III B, ch. 9, that “The words of Yang Chu and Mo Ti fill the world!” Yang Chu, another philosopher of the time, seems to have taught a rather extreme every-man-for-himself doctrine which Mencius believed posed, along with the universal love doctrine of Mo Tzu, the greatest threat to the Confucian concept of unselfish but carefully graded benevolence and kindness toward others. It would seem, therefore, that the teachings of Mo Tzu had attained considerable vogue in Mencius’ time, though Mencius, like so many thinkers, probably has a tendency to exaggerate the over-all potency of philosophical ideas as a whole, and of those of his enemies in particular. It should also be noted that Mencius lived in the same northeastern area of China where Mo Tzu had lived and taught, and where Mo Tzu’s ideas could be expected to have the strongest following.

Nevertheless, other works of the third century in addition to the *Mencius* suggest that Mo-ism at this period stood side by side with Confucianism as one of the most important philosophical schools of the time. And yet, from the second century on, after the unification of the empire under the Ch’in and later the Han dynasties, though Mo-ism is still mentioned as a system of thought, we hear nothing more of the Mo-ist school and its followers. What became of them?

Mencius, in the passage cited above, after commenting on the disturbing prevalence of Mo-ist ideas, proceeds to a biased and cursory rebuttal of them, claiming that Mo Tzu’s doctrine of universal love is equivalent to “being without a father”; that is, it violates the Confucian concept of a graded love that is strongest for one’s own relatives and friends and weaker for those less closely related by blood or association. Some scholars tend to regard this brief attack of Mencius as the blow that killed Mo-ism, though this is surely to invest the words of Mencius with far more weight and authority than they ever possessed in the intellectual world of ancient China. In later centuries, when Mencius was hailed as the true interpreter of Confucianism and the *Mencius* became a classic, such a pronouncement may have effectively discouraged any revival of interest in Mo Tzu and his ideas. But in the second and first centuries B.C. it could hardly have killed off the Mo-ist school.

What killed Mo-ism, I believe, was the fact that profound changes in Chinese society and intellectual life rendered so many of its tenets unappealing to the members of the ruling class, the audience to which it was primarily directed.

In the centuries following Mo Tzu’s death, technological progress in agriculture and industry and the growth of trade made the life of the upper classes far more affluent than it had been in his day, and they were less inclined than ever to listen to sermons on frugality and plain living. At the same time, a growing atmosphere of sophistication and rationalism led men to reject or radically reinterpret the ancient legends and religious beliefs that Mo Tzu had so fervently affirmed. The common people probably continued to hold fast to the old beliefs, and indeed the idea of the retribution of the spirits reappears, as vigorous as ever, among the tenets of popular Taoism in the second century A.D. But educated men of the Ch’in and Han no doubt cast a skeptical eye on Mo Tzu’s tales of vengeful ghosts. Finally, the bald utilitarianism with which he supported his doctrines, though a cogent argument in narrowly political concerns, was felt to be an inadequate basis for an entire system of moral philosophy. Beside Confucian ethics or the metaphysics of Taoism, it held little attraction for the men of an urbane and aesthetic-minded society.

The author of a late chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*, commenting upon the dour Mo-ist philosophy which allows “no singing in life, no mourning in death,” remarks: “It causes the people to be anxious, to be sorrowful, and its ways are hard to follow” (*Chuang Tzu*, ch. 10, “T’ien-hsia”). This, we may suppose, was how most men of later centuries felt about the puritanical and superstitious elements of Mo Tzu’s teachings. What remained—his emphasis upon selecting and promoting worthy men to office, upon the welfare of the people, upon pacifism and benevolent authoritarianism—was perfectly compatible, and in

fact almost identical, with traditional Confucian teachings, and could therefore be easily absorbed in the Confucian school. Thus we find writers of the second and first centuries B.C. talking about *Ju-Mo*, “the doctrines of the Confucians and Mo-ists,” not as though they were two fiercely rival systems of thought, but as though they were synonymous, or at least complementary.²

One more reason may be suggested for the decline of the Mo-ist school and the indifference of later ages to its doctrines. This is the nature of the work in which its ideas have been preserved, the *Mo Tzu*, particularly those portions described above which deal with Mo Tzu’s own doctrines. We do not know exactly when these chapters were written, but it is probable that they represent one of the earliest attempts at philosophical writing in Chinese, preceded only by the fragmentary *Analects*. In view of this, it is perhaps unfair to compare the book with the more subtle, individualistic and polished works of the following century, such as the *Chuang Tzu*, *Hsün Tzu*, and *Han Fei Tzu*. Nevertheless, making allowances for its antiquity, one cannot help noting that the *Mo Tzu*, whatever the interest of its ideas, is seldom a delight to read. Its arguments are almost always presented in an orderly and lucid, if not logically convincing, fashion. But the style as a whole is marked by a singular monotony of sentence pattern, and a lack of wit or grace that is atypical of Chinese literature in general. *Han Fei Tzu*, sec. 32, records an anecdote in which a ruler of the time questions a Mo-ist scholar on the reason for the flat, unadorned style of the work. The Mo-ist replies with a parable intimating that, if a writer employs too florid and engaging a style, his readers are apt to become so dazzled by the rhetoric that they lose sight of what is being said. Whatever one may think of the validity of this assertion, it is quite possible that the Mo-ists did deliberately adopt a straightforward, bare style for just such reasons. The extreme repetitiousness of the work, for example, suggests that the writer or writers are not repeating themselves merely out of paucity of invention, but are attempting purposely to drum certain set phrases into the mind of the reader, much like the slogan-vendors of our own time.³

When translating an author whose style is genuinely interesting and varied, the translator may perhaps be justified in disguising minor lapses and redundancies when he brings the work over into another language. But when repetitiousness constitutes the main feature of the style of the original, he can be faithful to the ethics of his trade, it would seem, only by reproducing such repetitions in full in the translation. This I have done, trusting that the reader will soon come to recognize the clusters of set phrases which, like patterns in a cloth, reappear again and again in the text.

In addition to this flatness of style, the *Mo Tzu* has been made even more taxing to read by the long neglect which the text has suffered. Whereas almost all other important works of early Chinese philosophy and literature had at least one commentary appended to them by the third or fourth century A.D., the *Mo Tzu* did not enjoy this attention until some fifteen hundred years later. Meanwhile the text, difficult enough to comprehend without a commentary, fell into worse and worse condition at the hands

² So completely did Confucian ideas come to dominate the outlook of educated Chinese that, when scholars of the present century began once more to study Mo Tzu’s philosophy, they found his religious views so radically “un-Chinese” that they were led to postulate a foreign origin for them. With more conviction than scholarship, they variously asserted that Mo Tzu was an Indian Buddhist, a Brahmin, or a Moslem from Arabia (!). For a convenient survey of these and other theories on the origin of the Mo-ist school, see the article in Chinese, “Mo-chia yuan-liu pien (I),” by Lu Kuang-liuan, *World Forum*, II (nos. 5–6, 1961), 2–5.

³ An extreme example of this is the slogan “Making music is wrong!” which Mo Tzu employs as a kind of refrain throughout his chapter attacking music. When the Confucian philosopher Hsün Tzu wrote a rebuttal to Mo Tzu’s arguments, he parodied this feature of Mo Tzu’s style by using a refrain of his own, “And yet Mo Tzu criticizes it. Why?” (*Hsün Tzu*, sec. 20).

of careless and baffled copyists. It is only in recent years that scholars have succeeded in untangling most of the garbles and elucidating the meaning to a reasonably satisfactory extent. The very repetitiousness of the text has considerably aided their efforts, since a passage which is corrupt in one section can often be restored from an uncorrupted parallel passage elsewhere. Nevertheless, many passages remain which cannot, without extensive and sometimes questionable emendation, be made to yield any sense at all. This is particularly true of Mo Tzu's frequent quotations from lost sections of the *Book of Documents*, which are in archaic style. Even where he quotes from sections of the *Documents* or *Odes* that are preserved today, we cannot be sure how he interpreted the passages he quotes. As pointed out in the notes, my translation is therefore in many places highly tentative.

AGAINST CONFUCIANS

PART I

(SECTION 39)

The Confucians⁴ say: "There are degrees to be observed in treating relatives as relatives, and gradations to be observed in honoring the worthy."⁵ They prescribe differences to be observed between close and distant relatives and between the honored and the humble. Their code of rites says: "Mourning for a father or mother should last three years; for a wife or eldest son, three years; for a paternal uncle, brother, or younger son, one year; and for other close relatives, five months." Now if the length of the mourning period is determined by the degree of kinship, then close relatives should be mourned for a long period and distant relatives for a short one. Yet the Confucians mourn the same length of time for a wife or eldest son as for a father or mother. And if the length of the mourning period is determined by the degree of honor due, then this means that the wife and eldest son are honored the same as the father and mother, while the paternal uncles and brothers are placed on the same level as younger sons! What could be more perverse than this?⁶

When a parent dies, the Confucians lay out the corpse for a long time before dressing it for burial while they climb up onto the roof, peer down the well, poke in the ratholes, and search in the washbasins, looking for the dead man. If they suppose that they will really find the dead man there, then they must be

⁴ The word *ju*, translated here as "Confucians," denotes a group of scholars in Chou times who devoted particular attention to matters of ritual and etiquette. Confucius became their most renowned representative, and after his time the word customarily refers to his disciples and those scholars who followed his teachings. The *Huai-nan Tzu*, a work of the 2d century B.C., states (ch. 21) that Mo Tzu himself in his youth studied the teachings of the *ju*.

⁵ The "Doctrine of the Mean," a section of the Confucian *Book of Rites*, contains a passage much like this. "Benevolence (*jen/ren*) is acting like a human being, and the most important part of it is treating one's relatives as relatives, Righteousness (*yi*) is doing what is right, and the most important part of it is honoring the worthy. The degrees to be observed in treating one's relatives as relatives, and the gradations to be observed in honoring the worthy, are the result of ritual principles (*li*)" (*Chung yung* XX,). Legge translates the phrase *ch'in ch'in* as "loving (one's) relatives," but I have used the more literal "treating one's relatives as relatives" in order to distinguish this type of love from the very different "universal love" advocated by Mo Tzu.

⁶ Mo Tzu is assuming that there is a closer relationship between a man and his parents than between a man and his wife and children, and that he owes greater respect to his parents and elder relatives than to his younger ones. The Confucians agreed in principle with these assumptions but, as we may see from their rules for mourning, modified them somewhat in practice.

stupid indeed, while if they know that he is not there but still search for him, then they are guilty of the greatest hypocrisy.⁷

When a Confucian takes a wife, he goes to fetch her in person. Wearing a formal black robe, he acts as his own coachman, holding the reins and handing her the cord by which to pull herself up into the carriage, as though he were escorting an honored parent. The wedding ceremonies are conducted with as much solemnity as the sacrifices to the ancestors. High and low are turned upside down, and parents are disregarded and scorned. Parents are brought down to the level of the wife, and the wife is exalted at the expense of service to the parents. How can such conduct be called filial? The Confucians say: “One takes a wife in order that she may aid in the sacrifices to the ancestors, and the son who is born of the union will in time become responsible for maintaining the ancestral temple. Therefore the wife and son are highly regarded.” But we reply that this is false and misleading. A man’s uncles and older brothers may maintain the temple of the ancestors for many years, and yet when they die the Confucian will mourn for them only one year. The wives of his brothers may aid in the sacrifices to the ancestors, and yet when they die he will not mourn for them at all. It is obvious, therefore, that the Confucians do not mourn three years for wives and eldest sons because wives and eldest sons maintain or aid in the sacrifices. Such concern for one’s wife and son is a troublesome involvement, and in addition the Confucians try to pretend that it is for the sake of their parents. In order to favor those whom they feel the most partiality for, they slight those whom they should respect the most. Is this not the height of perversity?

In addition, the Confucians believe firmly in the existence of fate and propound their doctrine, saying, “Long life or early death, wealth or poverty, safety or danger, order or disorder are all decreed by the will of Heaven and cannot be modified. Failure and success, rewards and punishments, good fortune and bad are all fixed. Man’s wisdom and strength can do nothing.” If the various officials believe such ideas, they will be lax in their duties; and if the common people believe them, they will neglect their tasks. If the officials fail to govern properly, disorder will result; and if agriculture is neglected, poverty will result. Poverty and disorder destroy the basis of the government, and yet the Confucians accept such ideas, believing that they are the doctrine of the Way (*dao*). Such men are the destroyers of the people of the world!

Moreover, the Confucians corrupt men with their elaborate and showy rites and music and deceive parents with lengthy mournings and hypocritical grief. They propound fatalism, ignore poverty, and behave with the greatest arrogance. They turn their backs on what is important, abandon their tasks, and find contentment in idleness and pride. They are greedy for food and drink and too lazy to work, but though they find themselves threatened by hunger and cold, they refuse to change their ways. They behave like beggars, stuff away food like hamsters, stare like he-goats, and walk around like castrated pigs. When superior men laugh at them, they reply angrily, “What do you fools know about good Confucians?” In spring and summer they beg for grain, and after the harvests have been gathered in they follow around after big funerals, with all their sons and grandsons tagging along. If they can get enough to eat and drink and get themselves put in complete charge of a few funerals, they are satisfied. What wealth they possess comes from other men’s families, and what favors they enjoy are the products of other men’s fields. When there is a death in a rich family, they are overwhelmed with joy, saying, “This is our chance for food and clothing!”

⁷ These were ancient practices handed down from the time when people really believed that they could find the soul of the dead man and bring him back to life. The Confucians, with their fondness for old rites, probably continued to practice them in Mo Tzu’s time. Confucian works such as the *Book of Rites* actually advocate the practice of “ascending the roof” to call back the dead man, not because such rituals were believed to have any real efficacy, but because they were regarded as fitting expressions of love for the deceased.

The Confucians say: “The superior man (*junzi*) must use ancient speech and wear ancient dress before he can be considered benevolent.” But we answer: The so-called ancient speech and dress were all modern once, and if at that time the men of antiquity used such speech and wore such dress, then they must not have been superior men. Must we then wear the dress of those who were not superior men and use their speech before we can be considered benevolent?

Again the Confucians say: “The superior man should be a follower and not a maker.”⁸ But we answer: In ancient times Yi invented the bow, Yü invented armor, Hsi-chung invented carts, and the craftsman Ch’iu invented boats. Do the Confucians mean, then, that the tanners, armorers, cart-makers and carpenters of today are all superior men and Yi, Yü, Hsi-chung, and the craftsman Ch’iu were all inferior men? Moreover, someone must have invented the ways which the Confucians follow, so that in following them they are, by their own definition, following the ways of inferior men.

The Confucians also say: “When the superior man is victorious in battle, he does not pursue the fleeing enemy. He protects himself with his armor, but does not shoot his arrows, and if his opponents turn and run, he will help them push their heavy carts.” But we answer: If the contestants are all benevolent men, then they will have no cause to become enemies. Benevolent men instruct each other in the principles of giving and taking, right and wrong. Those without a cause will follow those who have a cause; those without wisdom will follow those who are wise. When they have no valid arguments of their own, they will submit to the arguments of others; when they see good, they will be won by it. How then could they become enemies? And if both parties in the struggle are evil, then although the victor does not pursue his fleeing opponents, protects himself with his armor but refrains from shooting them, and helps them push their heavy carts if they turn and run—though he does all these things, he will still never be considered a superior man. Let us suppose that a sage, in order to rid the world of harm, raises his troops and sets out to punish an evil and tyrannical state. But, having gained victory, he employs the methods of the Confucians and orders his soldiers, saying: “Do not pursue the fleeing enemy! Protect yourselves with your armor but do not shoot your arrows, and if your opponents turn and run, help them push their heavy carts.” Then the evil and disorderly men will get away alive, and the world will not be rid of harm. This is to inflict cruelty upon the parents of the world and do the age a great injury. Nothing could be more unrighteous.

Again the Confucians say: “The superior man is like a bell. Strike it and it will sound; do not strike it and it will remain silent.” But we answer: The superior man exerts the utmost loyalty in serving his lord and strives for filial piety in serving his parents. If those whom he serves achieve goodness, he will praise them; and if they have any fault, he will admonish them. This is the way of a subject. Now if one sounds only when struck and remains silent otherwise, then one will be concealing his knowledge and sparing his strength, waiting in dumb silence until he has been questioned. Though he may know of some way to bring benefit to his lord or, parents, he will not mention it unless asked. A great revolt may be about to break out, bandits to rise up, or some trap to spring, and no one knows of it but himself, and yet, though he is actually in the presence of his lord or his parents, he will not mention it unless asked. This is the most perverse kind of treason! As subjects such men are disloyal; as sons they are unfilial. They are disrespectful in serving their elder brothers and unfaithful in their dealings with others. Though one may prefer not to speak out in court before being questioned he should at least be concerned to speak out when he sees something that will profit himself. And if the ruler makes some proposal that does not seem beneficial, one should fold one’s hands, gaze at the ground and, speaking in a hoarse voice

⁸ Probably a reference to Confucius’ description of himself as “a transmitter, and not a maker” (*Analects* VII, I). The verb *tso*, “to make,” may also mean “to invent.”

as though lost in thought, reply, “I do not fully understand the matter. Though it is an emergency we must avoid acting wrongly.”⁹

Every doctrine, discipline, and standard of benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*) is intended on a larger scale to be used in governing men, and on a smaller scale to fit one for holding office; abroad it is to be spread among all men, and at home it serves for self-cultivation. One should not abide in unrighteousness nor practice what is not in accordance with principle. He should work to promote what is beneficial to the world, both directly and indirectly, and avoid what is of no benefit. This is the way of the superior man. And yet, from what we have heard of the conduct of Confucius, it was exactly the opposite of this.

Duke Ching of Ch’i asked Master Yen,¹⁰ “What sort of man is Confucius?” Master Yen did not reply. The duke asked once more, but again Master Yen did not reply. Duke Ching said, “Many people have spoken to me about Confucius, and all of them believed him to be a worthy man. Now when I ask you about him, why don’t you answer?”

Master Yen replied, “I am a worthless person and incapable of recognizing a worthy man when I see one. But I have heard it said that when a worthy man enters a foreign state, he will do his best to promote friendly relations between its ruler and its subjects and to dispel hatred between superiors and subordinates. Yet when Confucius went to the state of Ching, he knew that the lord of Po was plotting revolt, and yet he aided him by introducing Shih Ch’i to him. As a result the ruler almost lost his life and the lord of Po suffered punishment.¹¹ I have also heard that when a worthy man obtains favor with those above, he does not waste the opportunity, and when he obtains favor with those below, he does nothing dangerous. If his words are heeded by the ruler, they will bring benefit to men; if his doctrines are carried out by those below, they will bring benefit to the ruler. His words are plain and easy to understand; his conduct is plain and easy to follow. His conduct and righteousness enlighten the people; His plans and schemes bring understanding to the lord and his ministers. Now Confucius conceived deep plans and far-reaching schemes in the service of a traitor. He racked his brain and exhausted his wisdom in carrying out evil. To encourage subordinates to rebel against their superiors and teach subjects how to murder their lords is not the conduct of a worthy man! To enter a foreign state and ally oneself with its traitors is not the mark of a righteous man. To realize that men are being disloyal and yet urge them on to rebellion is not in accordance with benevolence and righteousness, To hide from others and then plot, to flee from others and then speak—this is not the kind of conduct and righteousness that enlightens the people; this is not the kind of planning and scheming that brings understanding to the ruler and his ministers. I cannot see how Confucius is any different from the lord of Po. That is why I did not answer your question.”

Duke Ching said, “I have benefitted greatly by your works. If it were not for you, I would never have realized that Confucius is the same as the lord of Po!”

⁹ The translation of this paragraph is highly tentative.

¹⁰ Master Yen or Yen Ying (d. 500 B.C.), acted as chief minister to Duke Ching and two of his predecessors. He was noted for his emphasis upon frugality in government and was a favorite figure of Mo-ist writers. A collection of anecdotes about Yen Ying and the rulers he served, strongly colored by Mo-ist thinking, is preserved under the title *Yen-tzu ch’un-ch’iu* (Spring and autumn of Master Yen).

¹¹ The lord of Po, a prince of the state of Ch’u (or Ching, as the text designates it here), led a revolt against the ruler of Ch’u in 479 B.C., the year of Confucius’ death. He was quickly defeated and committed suicide. According to all reliable sources, both Duke Ching and Yen Ying had by this time been dead for some years. There is likewise no evidence that Confucius ever had any connection with the lord of Pa or his famous retainer, Shib Ch’i.

Confucius went to the state of Ch'i and had an interview with Duke Ching. Duke Ching was pleased with him and wanted to enfeoff him in Ni-ch'i. When he announced his intention to Master Yen, the latter said, "That will not do! The Confucians behave in an arrogant and self-righteous manner, which makes it impossible for them to set a good example for their subordinates. They love music and corrupt others, which makes it impossible to entrust them with a personal share in the government. They preach fatalism and neglect their tasks, which makes it impossible to entrust them with an office. They make much of funerals and seek to prolong grief, which makes it impossible for them to take proper care of the people. They wear strange clothes and affect a humble manner, which makes it impossible for them to be leaders of the multitude. Confucius, with his imposing appearance and attention to elaborate detail, misleads the age. With his music and dancing he attracts followers; with his multitude of ritual prescriptions to be observed in ascending and descending stairs he propounds his ceremonies; with his emphasis upon the rules for hastening and scurrying about court he impresses the multitude. His broad learning is of no use in deciding what is right for the age; his labored thinking does nothing to aid the people. One could live a couple of lifetimes and still not master all the learning of the Confucians; in all those years one could not succeed in carrying out all their rites; while the largest fortune would not be sufficient to cover the expenses of their music. With their attention to appearance and detail and their evil practices they delude the rulers of the time; with their elaborate musical performances they corrupt the ignorant people. Their doctrines cannot be used as a model for the age; their learning cannot be used to guide the multitude. Now you intend to enfeoff Confucius because you hope he will reform the customs of the people of Ch'i, but this is not the way to lead the nation and guide the multitude!"

"Very well," said the duke. After that he treated Confucius with generosity and courtesy but withheld the fief. He received him with respect but did not inquire about his doctrines.

Confucius was furious and grew angry at Duke Ching and Master Yen. He persuaded Ch'ih-i Tzu-p'i to become a follower of T'ien Ch'ang and then, having told Master Hui of Nan-kuo what he wanted done, returned to Lu.¹² After a while, word came that Ch'i was planning to attack Lu. Confucius said to his disciple Tzu-kung, "Tz'u, now is the time to begin the great undertaking!" He then sent Tzu-kung to Ch'i, where, through the introduction of Master Hui of Nan-kuo, he was able to see T'ien Ch'ang. He urged T'ien Ch'ang to attack Wu instead of Lu, and persuaded Kao-kuo Pao-yen not to interfere with T'ien Ch'ang's plans for revolt. Then he went and urged Yüeh to attack Wu. For three years both Ch'i and Wu were in danger of being destroyed, and the corpses of the dead piled up in countless numbers. This was due to the scheming of Confucius.

When Confucius was acting as minister of justice in Lu, he spurned the ducal house and supported Chi Sun.¹³ Chi Sun was prime minister of Lu, but he ran away from his post and, as he was struggling with the men of the city to get out the gate, Confucius lifted up the gate bar for him.

¹² The T'iens, who had originally been rulers of the state of Ch'en and are therefore often referred to by the surname Ch'en, were a powerful ministerial family of Ch'i who eventually overthrew the ducal house of Ch'i and assumed rulership of the state. In 481 B.C., two years before Confucius died, T'ien Ch'ang assassinated Duke Chien of Ch'i, and this is the "revolt" referred to later on. As in the previous anecdote, the Mo-ists are attempting to show that Confucius and his disciples were at the bottom of all this dirty work, though there is no evidence in other sources to support this. On the contrary, *Analects* XIV, 22, and *Tso chuan*, Duke Ai 14, tell us that, when T'ien Ch'ang assassinated Duke Chien, Confucius personally urged the duke of Lu to undertake an expedition to punish him.

¹³ Chi Sun was a member of a powerful ministerial family of Lu that, like the T'ien family in Ch'i, had in effect usurped control of the government from the ducal family. Again there is no evidence to support the charges made against Confucius.

Once, when Confucius was in trouble between Ts'ai and Ch'en, he lived for ten days on soups made of greens without any rice mixed in.¹⁴ His disciple Tzu-lu boiled a pig for him, and Confucius ate the meat without asking where it had come from. Tzu-lu also robbed someone of his robe and exchanged it for wine, and Confucius drank the wine without asking where it came from. But when he was received by Duke Ai of Lu, Confucius refused to sit down unless his mat was straight, and refused to eat unless the food was cut up properly. Tzu-lu came forward and asked, "Why do you do the opposite of what you did when we were between Ch'en and Ts'ai?"

Confucius said, "Come here, and I will tell you. At that time we were intent upon staying alive. Now we are intent upon acting righteously." Thus when Confucius was starving and in trouble, he did not hesitate to grab at anything at all to keep himself alive, but when he was satiated he behaved hypocritically in order to appear refined. What greater vileness and hypocrisy could there be? Once, while Confucius was sitting and chatting with his disciples, he said, "When Shun saw Ku Sou, he felt uneasy. At that time, the empire was in danger.¹⁵ Tan, the duke of Chou, was not a benevolent man, was he? Why did he abandon his home and go off to live alone?"¹⁶

Such was the conduct of Confucius and the way his mind worked. His followers and disciples all imitated him. Thus, Tzu-kung and Chi Lu aided K'ung Li in raising a revolt in the state of Wei; Yang Huo revolted in Ch'i; Pi Hsi held the territory of Chung-mou in rebellion; and Ch'i Tiao suffered a mutilating punishment. No one could be worse than these men!¹⁷

Disciples and students, following their teacher, will practice his doctrines and use his conduct as a model, only in some cases their strength and wisdom are not equal to those of the teacher. Now if Confucius behaved in such a way, it is obvious that Confucian scholars should be regarded with suspicion!

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Mo Tzu: Basic Writings. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

¹⁴ The fact that Confucius and his disciples, in the course of their travels, ran out of provisions in the area of the states of Ch'en and Ts'ai, is attested by *Analects* XV. The rest of the anecdote is apocryphal.

¹⁵ Ku Sou was the evil father of Shun. The remark is found in many early works, and is customarily interpreted to mean that Shun was uneasy at the thought that, though ruler of the empire, he was obliged to remain respectful and obedient to such an evil parent. The Mo-ists, however, apparently interpreted it as an attack by Confucius on the character of Shun. There is no evidence that Confucius actually made the remark.

¹⁶ A legend, repeated elsewhere in the *Mo Tzu* (ch. II, sec. 46), says that the duke of Chou, brother of King Wu, resigned from his ministerial position at court and retired for a time to his fief in Lu. Since he was revered as a sage, the Mo-ists are attempting to damage Confucius' reputation by picturing him as sneering at the duke of Chou.

¹⁷ Tzu-kung and Chi Lu, i.e., Tzu-lu, were disciples of Confucius. There is no evidence, however, that the former had anything to do with the revolt in Wei, and the name should perhaps be emended to Tzu-kaio, an official of Wei who was said to have been a disciple of Confucius. Tzu-lu's part in the revolt, which took place in 480 B.C., is recorded in *Tso chuan*, Duke Ai 15. The other men mentioned seem to have had little or no connection with Confucius.

QUESTIONS

1. Why might Mozi be regarded as the “first true philosopher of China”? What are the three tests of argument which Mozi uses to examine contrasting theories about the *dao*? What is then the basis of Mozi’s criticism of the Confucian *dao*?
2. What did Mozi mean by *jian’ai*? How did he argue for this principle and why was it so challenging to traditional Chinese culture and especially to the Confucian tradition?
3. What is Mozi’s argument against aggressive war?