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The Nature and Scope of Mohist Morality

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Abstract

A survey of the *Mozi* reveals that the Mohist Way can be thought of as a "way of *yi*" (*yidao* 義道) that can be contrasted with Confucius' "way of *ren*" (*rendao* 仁道). The study aims to spell out Mozi's ethical concern more fully. It argues that the Mohists were mainly concerned with appropriate norms that individuals and communities ought to live by so that they are able to peacefully coexist and enjoy mutual benefit. These norms are not only meant to guide people's deliberations and regulate their behavior they also govern the distribution of praise and blame, approval and disapproval, and reward and punishment in the human collective. The Mohists also assumed a larger cosmic setting in which Heaven and its supernatural agents are upholders of and stakeholders in the prevalence of *yi* in the human collective. With these points in mind, the Mohists' ethical concern can thus be thought of as a concern with "social morality", rather than the wider region of morality. In understanding the nature and scope of their concerns in this way, the path is also open to a deeper understanding of the difference between the Mohists and their Confucian rivals.

Keywords: Mozi, Mohism, Confucianism, Morality

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I. Introduction

As with other thinkers from their time—Confucian thinkers being the prime example—the Mohists of Ancient China were not merely concerned to establish a body of bloodless truths but to address certain practical concerns. They sought to advocate and defend a Way (*dao* 道) that, if put into practice by individuals and communities, would restore good order (*zhi* 治) to the world, this, being their proposed solution to the perceived chaos (*luan* 亂) of the times (Graham 1989). We can thus think of the Mohists' Way as a specific (and potentially controversial) answer to the question: "What is the best, most desirable way for individuals and communities to conduct their affairs, a way that is best and desirable not only for 'us Mohists,' but in some sense for everyone?" The subject of this study, however, deals with an earlier stage of the inquiry. For before we get to the Mohists' *answer* to the previous question, it would be worthwhile to find a way to more sharply delineate the nature and scope of their concern.

Now, a survey of the *Mozi* reveals that their Way is largely spelled out in terms of the desire that *yi* (義; roughly, "rightness, righteousness" for now) prevails in the world. Tang Junyi (1986, 156-9) speaks of "Mozi's way of *yi*" (*Mozi zhi yi dao* 墨子之義道) and contrasts it to "Confucius' way of *ren*" (*Kongzi zhi rendao* 孔子之仁道; *ren* is roughly "benevolence" or "humaneness"). He reminds us that the "Guiyi" 貴義 (Honoring *yi*) chapter of *Mozi* opens with the claim that "of the myriad things there is nothing more honorable (or valuable) than *yi*" (*wanshi mo gui yu yi* 萬事莫貴于義), and that the major proposals of the *Mozi* are all argued for on the basis that they are what *yi* requires. But the fact that the Mohists' Way is primarily laid out in terms of *yi* instead of, say, *ren*, suggests the possibility that they might be answering a *different* (even if related) question when compared to Confucius and his followers. At the very least, there is the possibility that they were dealing with a related but slightly different version of the question "What is the best, most desirable way for individuals and communities to conduct their affairs, a way that is best and desirable not only for 'us Mohists,' but in some sense for everyone?"

To anticipate, this study will argue that the Mohists—given the ideas expressed in the core chapters of the *Mozi*[1]—were primarily concerned with the appropriate norms that individuals and communities ought to live by so that they are able to peacefully coexist and enjoy mutual benefit (Section III). These norms are intended to play a significant role in people's practical deliberations and regulate their behavior rather than the quality of their character (Section IV). Beyond that, these norms govern the distribution of praise and blame, approval and disapproval, and reward and punishment in the human collective society (Section V). There is a *religious* dimension to these norms: even though they are mainly for the regulation of *human* conduct, the Mohists assumed a larger cosmic setting in which Heaven and its supernatural agents, the ghosts and spirits, are upholders of and stakeholders in the prevalence of *yi* in the human collective (Section VI).

In the concluding section, I suggest that the Mohist concern with *yi* is functionally equivalent to a concern with *social morality* and recognizable as what we would call a concern with *social justice* (Section VII). To borrow a distinction articulated by Gerald Gaus (drawing on previous work by Peter Strawson and Kurt Baier), we can say that the Mohists' main concern was with the rules that "structure social interaction in ways that are beneficial to all and make social existence possible . . . requirements (including prohibitions) that are to direct people's social interactions" rather than a larger domain that includes "visions of what makes life worth living and what con-

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1 The core chapters of the *Mozi* refer to the ten triadic sets of chapters (seven are marked "missing") numbered 8 to 37 in the received corpus of the *Mozi*. Each triad of chapters expounds on a key Mohist ethical-political doctrine. The ten doctrines, also the traditional titles of the ten triads, are: "Shangxian" 尚賢 (Elevating the Worthy), "Shangtong" 尚同 (Exalting Unity), "Jian'ai" 兼愛 (Impartial Caring), "Feigong" 非攻 (Against Military Aggression), "Jieyong" 節用 (Frugality in Expenditures), "Jiezang" 節葬 (Frugality in Funerals), "Tianzhi" 天志 (Heaven's Will), "Minggui" 明鬼 (Elucidating the Spirits), "Feiyue" 非樂 (Against Music), and "Feiming" 非命 (Against Fatalism). References to the text of the *Mozi* will use the edition of the text in *Mozi yinde* 墨子引得, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 21 (1948), cited by chapter and line number. All translations from the Chinese are my own unless otherwise noted. For more information on *Mozi*, the Mohists, and their text, see the introductions to Knoblock and Riegel (2013) and Johnston (2010). See also Ivanhoe (1998, 451-55).

stitutes a noble or virtuous life (2010, 3). Now, previous scholars have already noticed that the Mohists were primarily concerned with social justice—I do not pretend that *this* is a new insight (the seminal work of A. C. Graham, Benjamin Schwartz, and Philip J. Ivanhoe come to mind). But the main burden of the paper *isn't* to argue that the Mohists' concern was with social morality or social justice—these are summary ways for us to *recognize* their concerns *as ethical concerns*. The intended modest contribution of the study is to spell out the contours of this ethical concern more fully from the textual evidence.

II. Some Key Terms (*Ren*, *Yi* and Their Combinations)

As briefly mentioned previously, "Mozi's way of *yi*" has been contrasted with "Confucius' way of *ren*." To get a better sense of what this might mean, we should first briefly discuss the terms *ren* and *yi* and lay out some basic observations about the way they are used in the core chapters of the *Mozi*. The point is not to demonstrate that *yi* is a more important term than *ren* for the *Mozi*—this is the conventional wisdom—but to draw some broad observations which indicate just how central *yi* is to Mohist thought. It is so central that even *ren* is assimilated to it.

To set a baseline context, let me first briefly spell out a basic contrast between *ren* and *yi*, especially as they appear in the ancient —especially Confucian—literature. The term *ren* (as it is used in texts such as the *Analects* and *Mencius*, for instance) takes both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broad sense, it refers to "an all-encompassing ideal for human beings" that can include such desirable qualities as "wisdom, courage, filial piety, conscientiousness, trustworthiness, a reverential or serious attitude, or even caution in speech and the ability to endure adverse circumstances" (Shun 1997, 23). The narrow sense of *ren* highlights "the specific aspect of the ideal having to do with affective concern for other people" (Shun 1997, 23, 49). The term *yi*, on the other hand, is cognate to the homophone 宜 (also *yi*)—"fitting"—suggesting the notion of "the fitting thing to do in relation to parents, rulers, and also to self" (Graham 1989, 11, 45) or more

generally, "proper" or "right" conduct, including the "proper" or "right" way to pursue what is in one's interest (Shun 1997, 25).[2] There is also a striking connection between *yi* and the absence of *ru* (辱 "disgrace"): the thing that is fitting with respect to self is to have a proper regard for oneself or having a sense of honor, something manifested, for instance, in not brooking an insult (Shun 1997, 25). Between the two, *ren* is more naturally taken as an attribute of agents rather than a quality of actions, conduct, or social practices, while the converse is often the case for *yi*.[3]

With the above background in mind, let us consider the data in the *Mozi*. The gross numbers already suggest the relative importance of the two terms to the *Mozi: yi* appears 192 times, and *ren*, 62 times in the core chapters of the *Mozi* (The numbers for the *Analects* are: *ren*, 111 times, and *yi*, 24 times; and for *Mencius: ren*, 158 times, *yi*, 108 times.) More importantly, there is a preponderance of passages making claims about what is required by or consistent with *yi* compared to passages citing other considerations. Second, only in the case of *yi* do the Mohists raise issues of foundation, i.e., the question: "From what does *yi* issue?" and sought to provide an answer to it in the "Tianzhi" chapters. No analogous question is ever raised with regards to any other ethical attribute in the core chapters of the *Mozi*. From these considerations alone, the general idea that the Mohist

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2 The idea that *yi* relates to the proper way to pursue what is in one's interest also explains the usual opposition between *yi* and *li* 利 (e.g., *Analects* 4.16, 14.12)—in this context usually "profit" rather than "benefit." It is not that *yi* is simply incompatible with *li*, but that *yi* conduct is partly understood as such conduct that does not pursue profit at the expense of a commitment to ethical standards.

3 "More than any other early Chinese ethical category, *yi* is concerned with action. Attributes such as *de* (charismatic or supernaturally supplied strength and virtue), *ren* (psychological second sight), or *zhi* (predictive wisdom) can be said to exist in individuals before they do anything to manifest those qualities. *De* and *ren* and *zhi* are in other words not dependent on prior action. But *yi* cannot exist until somebody does something. Once the action is done, and *yi* appears, however, it will go on indefinitely in the reciprocal actions and attitudes of those affected by the original action and the original doer; and thus *yi* can come to mean obligation or fealty as well as swashbucklingly righteous action" (Henry 2004, 8).

D. C. Lau also notes that while *ren* "is basically a character of moral agents and its application to acts is only derivative," *yi* "is basically a character of acts and its application to agents is derivative" (1992, xxvi).

Way is a "Way of *yi*" rather than a "Way of *ren*" is already evident.

But it turns out that the sheer centrality of *yi* to the Mohists shows through even when we focus on the passages in the *Mozi* where *ren* appears. Within the core chapters of the *Mozi ren* seldom appears as an independent attribute. More commonly, it occurs as part of a combination, e.g., *renren* 仁人, *renzhe* 仁者 or *renyi* 仁義, or the conjunction "*ren* and *yi*." In what follows, I will draw three observations from the way *ren* and combinations involving *ren* are used in the text. The first is that the Mohists tend to use *renyi* and the conjunction "*ren* and *yi*" as surrogates for *yi*. The second is that even in the few places where *ren* appears as an independent attribute, it is assimilated to *yi*. And the third is that both the *renren* and *renzhe* are basically defined in terms of the demands of *yi* or its surrogates.

First, *renyi* and "*ren* and *yi*." Grammatically, conjunction in early Chinese can be (and is often) expressed through coordination, which means that "*renyi*" could just be "*ren* and *yi*." But the combination is often better taken as a compound formed by parataxis of two related but contrasting terms, and with the whole having the abstract sense of "morality" (i.e., the wider domain which includes such things as *ren* and *yi*).[4] What is interesting is that within the core chapters of the *Mozi*," the combination often occurs in contexts suggesting that it is meant to be interchangeable with *yi*.

Consider the argument against military aggression in "Feigong A." The conclusion is that aggressive war is *bu-yi* (i.e., not *yi*). While the second half of the chapter refers only to *yi* (and *bu-yi*), *ren* and *renyi* also appear in the first part of the chapter (17/1-7). Here, in three iterations of what seems to be one basic type of argument—all used to show that some action (or type of action) is morally worse than another—the Mohists first appeal to a premise:

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4 D. C. Lau translates many of the combinations' occurrence in the *Mencius* using "morality" or one of its cognates; see *Mencius* (1984); see e.g., 3B.4, 3B.9, 4B.19, 6A.1 and 6B.4. The combination also appears in texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi* in contexts in which it is parallel to the abstract *shifei* 是非, "right and wrong"; see e.g., *Zhuangzi* 2/6/15, 6/19/8 (Lau and Chen 2000) and *Xunzi* 8/42, 8/103 (*Xunzi yinde* 荀子引得, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 22, 1950).

> (1) Take two actions X, Y: If X causes more injury to another party than Y, then it is more *bu-ren* (i.e., not *ren*) and is a more serious crime than Y, in which case X is more *bu-yi* than Y (see 17/2);

Then switch to a nearly identical premise in the second iteration:

> (2) Take two actions X, Y: If X causes more injury to another party than Y, then it is more *bu-ren* and is a more serious crime than Y, in which case X is more *bu-renyi* (i.e., not *renyi*) than Y (see 17/3);

Before switching back to premise (1) again in the third iteration (17/5)—as if (1) and (2) are meant to be interchangeable. In fact, except for (2), the conclusion (and intermediate conclusions) of the argument is spelt out exclusively in terms of *yi* and *bu-yi*—suggesting that for the Mohists, *bu-renyi* is interchangeable with *bu-yi*. Similar observations can be made in every case where the terms *renyi* and *yi* occur in proximity (25/75-81, 27/1-2, 72-73 and 28/71-73).[5] Incidentally, the above also exemplify the Mohists' emphasis on behavior (and outcomes) rather than the agent's character when talking about *yi*—and by implication, *renyi*.

The same interchangeability (with *yi*) also applies to the conjunction "*ren* and *yi*" indicated by such locutions as *renye, yiye* 仁也, 義也 ("is *ren*, is *yi*"; 25/8, 12-13, 68, 27/50; cf. 16/46) and their negations *fei-ren, fei-yi* 非仁, 非義 ("is not *ren*, is not *yi*"; 25/14-15, 70, 27/58) and *bu-ren, bu-yi* 不仁, 不義 ("not being *ren*, not being *yi*"; 28/42-43, 51, 54-55). In "Jiezang," the Mohists say that ever since the passing of the ancient sage kings, the world has lost its grip on *yi* (25/7-8) and because of that, people disagree over whether elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning "are *ren* and *yi*" or are "*fei-renyi*" (25/8). Similar moves back and forth between "*bu-renyi*" and "*bu-ren bu-yi*" can also be found in "Tianzhi" C (28/50-55; also 34-43). In other words, not only is *yi* sometimes interchanged with *renyi* in the core chapters, "*ren* and *yi*" can likewise stand in for either of them as well. The Mohists were

5 This phenomenon continues in the *Mozi* outside the core chapters (see 48/81-83). This relation between *yi* and *renyi* in the *Mozi* seems analogous to that between *li* 禮 and *liyi* 禮義 in *Xunzi*, "Lilun" (see 19/1-5); see also Shun (2000, 24).

probably using *renyi*—with "*ren* and *yi*" being the variant—to refer to the larger genus that encompasses such representative concerns as *ren* and *yi*. Nonetheless, given their specific interest in that aspect of morality denoted by *yi*, they sometimes use the more general expression as a synecdoche for the more specific notion.

Second, *ren*, as an independent attribute in the core chapters, occurs basically only in two places: Chapter 17 "Feigong A" (17/3, 4, 6), and Chapter 27 "Tianzhi B" (27/72). While all the cases are compatible with the term meaning "affective concern for other people," none of them *demand* such a reading.[6] More importantly, they suggest that the Mohists assimilate *ren* to *yi*. The passage in "Tianzhi B" talks about applying Heaven's intent as a standard for determining whether the rulers have or have not been *ren* (see 27/69-72). But the argument of the chapter is exactly that something is *yi* if and only if it accords with the intent of Heaven, which meant that the standard for determining if something is *yi* turns out to be a standard for *ren* as well. The passage in "Feigong A" is the previously mentioned argument against military aggression. Recall that in both Premise (1) and Premise (2), the Mohists talk about how, if some action X causes more injury to another party than Y, then it is more *bu-ren* and is a more serious crime than Y, in which case X is more *bu-yi* (17/2, 5) or *bu-renyi* (17/3) than Y. So, the fact that something is *bu-ren* plays no independent role in the argument besides being an indication that it is *bu-yi* (or *bu-renyi*). The upshot is that Mohists seem interested in *ren* mainly so far as it relates to *yi* or *renyi*—their more fundamental concern. In other words, even in the few places where *ren* appears as an independent attribute, it is assimilated to *yi*.

Third, the *renren* ("benevolent man") and the *renzhe* ("benevolent one"). These tend to appear in contexts suggesting that they denote ideal sage rulers (e.g., compare 14/1 with 15/1, 16/1). As a result, "what the *renren* or *renzhe* would do" is metonymic for "what the ruler ought to do" (25/1, 12-16).[7] But they are primarily presented as agents who

6 In the *Mohist Canons* (A7), *ren* is defined in terms of *ai* 愛 (for now roughly "love" or "concern") (Graham 1978, 270).

7 Note that this way of using *renren* or *renzhe* is not unique to the Mohists; Similar uses of such terms as standing in for an ideal ruler can also be found in the *Xunzi* where

conduct their affairs according to the dictates of *yi* or its surrogates. For example, it is argued in "Jiezang" that if elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning lead to good results, then they are "*ren* and *yi*" and the *renzhe* would adopt them and have the people praise and follow them; if they lead to undesirable consequences, then they are "neither *ren* nor *yi*" and the *renzhe* would seek to eliminate them and have the people condemn them (25/12-16). In other words, the *renren* and *renzhe* are basically defined in terms of the demands of *yi* or its surrogates.

In sum, it is not just that the Mohists talk mainly about *yi* rather than *ren*—their doctrine assimilates considerations of *ren* to considerations of *yi* (or its surrogates *renyi*, and "*ren* and *yi*"). This outcome adds a specific twist to the observation that the Mohists Way is a Way of *yi*. But can more be said to explicate what all this *means*, so that the Mohists' concern *makes sense to us as an ethical concern*? To answer this question, we need to clarify the salient features and ramifications of the ethical considerations denoted by the term *yi* within the economy of human life, as such are presented in the text. This will be the burden of the next few sections (III-VI).

III. The Nature of *Yi* as an Ethical Concern

Now, to say that a thing is *yi* is to commend that it is in some way "proper," and conversely, to say that something is *bu-yi* is to mount a criticism. But what sorts of items are liable to be qualified as either *yi* (or *bu-yi*)? In some passages of the core chapters of the *Mozi*, *yi* (or *bu-yi*) appears as an attribute of *acts* (or more likely, *types of action*). In the earlier cited passage from "Feigong A," for instance, "entering an orchard and stealing the peaches and plums of another," "carrying off dogs, swine, chickens, and piglings of another," "breaking into another man's stable and seizing his horses and cows," and "murdering an innocent man, stripping him of his clothing, and appropriating his

they are parallel with "enlightened lord" (*mingzhu* 明主; 11/4, 25-26 and 30) and with "sage king" (*shengwang* 聖王; 6/20-21).

spear and sword" are all presented as instances of *bu-yi* or types of actions that are *bu-yi* (17/1-6). In other passages, *yi* and its surrogates appear as a quality of practices or ways of doing things. In "Jiezang," for instance, the Mohists argue that the aristocratic practices of elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning are *bu-yi*. Relatedly, *yi* also features as an attribute of *ways of conduct or patterns of behavior*. For instance, the contrast between the "rule of might" and the "rule of *yi*" in "Tianzhi A" (26/36-41) and "Tianzhi C" (28/35-43; cf. 27/46-50, 55-58) is one between two opposing ways of conduct or patterns of behavior. The former is characterized in terms of powerful individuals and groups oppressing the weak, while the latter, the powerful *not* oppressing the weak. Notice also that the *subject* of the behavior could be either an individual or a group agent.

Another sort of item is also qualified as either *yi* or *bu-yi* in the core chapters of the *Mozi*: *doctrine* (*yan* 言; 26/42-43; cf. 27/68). Keep in mind that for the Mohists, *yan* is something that one can "take as a model" (verbal *fa* 法; 25/18) or "apply" (*yong* 用; 35/18). It also corresponds to the "model" (nominal *fa*; see 21/3, 5, 8, 14, 25/83), "scheme" (*mou* 謀), or "way" (*dao* 道) that one can "apply" (*yong*) or "practice" (*xing* 行; 10/27, 25/8-15). The way to understand these connections is to see *yan* as a verbal counterpart to a practice or a way of conduct, a pattern of words meant to guide conduct. In this regard, an instance of *yan* would be *yi* if the conduct that it enjoins is *yi*, and *bu-yi* if the conduct that it commends is *bu-yi*. In other words, an agent who holds to (*zhi* 執; 25/18) a *yan* that is *yi* and conducts himself accordingly would be behaving in a manner as required by *yi*, but not if the *yan* enjoins the opposite. These considerations go hand in hand with the observation that when the Mohists evaluate a practice, they sometimes speak in terms of evaluating the *yan* that corresponds to that practice (25/7-17).[8]

So, the sorts of entities that might be qualified as *yi* or *bu-yi* include actions, practices, ways of conduct, patterns of behavior, and derivatively, even *yan*. But in what sense are they "proper" when qualified as *yi*? One part of the answer is suggested by various passages

[8] See also Loy (2011, 652-54).

in the "Tianzhi" triad of chapters that link "when *yi* prevails in the world" with the situation of the world being well governed, in a good order, and its welfare promoted (26/12-13, 27/3-4, 28/9-10). But as pointed out earlier, this is not an indifferent understanding of order. Recall the earlier mention d contrast between "rule of might" and the "rule of *yi*" (from "Tianzhi" 26/36-41, 28/35-43; also 27/46-50, 55-58). Presumably *yi* is said to "rule" in the world when the conduct of individuals and groups measure up to *yi*. In contrast, "might rules" when agents pursue courses of actions without regard to *yi*—they do things just because they have the strength to do so despite the contrary desires of others. As a result, *force of strength* determines the outcomes (as we say, "might is right"). Now, according to the text, "might rules" when the great states attack small ones, great families overthrow small ones, the strong oppress the weak, the many harry the few, the cunning deceive the stupid, the eminent lord it over the humble, and so on. Conversely, "*yi* rules" when the great states do not attack small ones, the strong do *not* oppress the weak, and so on. These descriptions suggest that for the Mohists, *yi* is to be understood in terms of certain *ethical norms* that are meant to *constrain and govern* how individuals and groups treat other individuals and groups as they pursue their own goals.

Importantly for the Mohists, considerations of *yi* are conceptually distinct from the merely traditional, customary or habitual, even if, as a matter of fact, they might happily coincide. This issue comes up explicitly in "Jiezang." The Mohists' case against the aristocratic practices of elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning largely rests on the argument that (akin to their position in "Jieyong" and "Feiyue") such practices are wasteful and place undue burdens upon the common people. At one point in the same chapter, an objector asks how is it that if elaborate funerals and prolonged mourning are contrary to the way of the ancient sage kings (whose conduct is acknowledged to be exemplary of *yi*; 19/4), these practices are nonetheless customary among "the gentlemen of the central states" (*zhongguo zhi junzi* 中國之君子; 25/74-75)? The Mohists' answer is that one who practices such things is really the sort who, "having found convenience in the habitual, (mis)took the customary for what is required by *yi*"

(25/75). The text then goes on describe the burial practices of three tribal peoples on the periphery of the Chinese world, all of which are vastly different from the current among "the gentlemen of the central states."

In order for the point of the reply to be carried across, I take it that the objector is expected to agree that the practices of the tribes are barbaric (and they are so presented; cf. 49/27-30) and not truly *yi*. The objector is also counted on to grant that what the tribes do are indeed the customary practices in their communities, and, just like the gentlemen of the central states, they too considered their practices consistent with *yi*. So, while customary practices differ from place to place, "we" denizens of the civilized center consider some of these customary practices "hardly the way of *renyi*" (25/79-81). The implied conclusion is that just because elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning are customary among the gentlemen of the central states, this, by itself, does not mean that they are *yi*.

One important assumption underlying the reply is that the gentlemen of the central states are not expected to simply retort: This is what we customarily do and isn't that the end of the matter? In other words, the Mohists count upon the gentlemen of the central states to agree that whether a practice is customary is one thing, but whether a custom is proper (while some other customs practiced by other tribes are improper) is something else. Mohists do not prove as much as they presuppose a distinction between what is customary and what is *yi*, a presupposition they take to be implied by the widely held judgment that the burial practices of the tribes are not *yi*; they are not just things "we"—the civilized denizens of the central states—happen to not practice.[9]

A second assumption underlying the reply to the objector is that the gentlemen of the central states are also not expected to simply

9 See Ross (1940, 12): "... we can now see clearly that 'right' does not mean 'ordained by any given society'. And it may be doubted whether even primitive men thought it did. Their thoughts about what in particular was right were to a large extent limited by the customs and sanctions of their race and age. But this is not the same as to say that they thought that 'right' just meant 'what my race and age ordains'... 'It is the custom' has been accompanied by 'the custom is right,' or 'the custom is ordained by someone who has the right to command.'"

retort: What does it matter to us if what we do is *yi* or *bu-yi*? That is, the objector is counted upon to agree that the consistency of their practices with the requirements of *yi* is a serious matter (25/8), that *yi* is a consideration that ought to weigh in their practical deliberations, that if their conduct had indeed been *bu-yi*, they would be open to criticism and have a positive consideration to change their ways. This second assumption raises important issues about how considerations of *yi* connect with individual motivation.

IV. The Connection between *Yi* and Individual Motivation

Suppose someone comes to acknowledge that a course of action he is contemplating whether to undertake is what *yi* requires, or that his current manner of conduct is *bu-yi.* Then something seems amiss if he merely says: "How interesting!" as if pondering the statement that white horses are not horses in the small talk that follows a dinner party. If such a circumstance should arise, we might wonder if the person has failed to grasp the significance of the point he has just conceded. It seems intrinsic to what it means for something to be required by *yi* that it is *supposed* to play a role in our practical deliberations. The fact that something is required by *yi* is supposed to be a consideration in favor of it, or, in more modern parlance, a *reason* (broadly construed) for undertaking that action. In fact, it is even supposed to be a serious consideration capable of overriding other considerations: considerations of *yi* present us with duties and obligations. The person who says, "How interesting!"—despite acknowledging that the proposed course of action is required by *yi*—might elicit puzzlement. Were he to further reject the course of action or worse still, to signal his intention to undertake an action that, on the face of it, is *bu-yi*, he would very likely invite a challenge for a defense of his ways. In fact, such a person might feel compelled to give an *apologia* even before we ask for one.

Take an example from "Jian'ai C." At one point, the objector concedes that the Mohist proposal of "impartial caring" (*jian'ai* 兼愛)—roughly, that people *ought* to be concerned about the welfare of

self, associates and strangers without distinction—" is *ren* and *yi*" (16/46; elsewhere, the critic concedes that *jian'ai* is "good," see 15/16, 30, 16/22). In other words, the critic is presented as (verbally) acknowledging that, in some sense, they *ought* to conduct themselves according to *jian'ai*. The problem, he claims, is that *jian'ai* is simply impracticable. It is no more possible for people to practice *jian'ai* than for someone to pick up a mountain and leap over a river with it (16/46).[10] But the critic's protestation presupposes that if *jian'ai* were not impracticable, then it being "*ren* and *yi*" counts seriously in its favor. On the other hand, if *jian'ai* is indeed impracticable, the point can be put forward as an excuse for his not being required to act in accordance with it—even while granting that (in some sense) it is what "*ren* and *yi*" demand.[11]

Or consider another passage from "Feigong C." The Mohists argue in the chapter that aggressive war is *bu-yi*. The "war-loving" rulers attempt to rebut the claim by arguing that the ancient sage kings—widely acknowledged models of *yi* conduct (19/4)—engaged in warfare too (19/31-32). They thus insinuate that war is not quite so *bu-yi.* A cynical argument, no doubt, but it presupposes the tacit acknowledgement that if their warlike activities are indeed *bu-yi*, it would count seriously against them. Conversely, if the war-loving rulers can make the case that their actions are *yi* (at least not *bu-yi*), they would have dealt a blow to the Mohists' arguments.

Not only would the rejection of a consideration of *yi* require a defense, the same applies if one "only" failed to attend sufficiently to them. This seems to be the presupposition underlying the Mohists' charge against the gentlemen of the world that they "fail to distinguish between *yi* and *bu-yi*" (e.g., 17/13-14). The substance of the charge is not

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10 In "Gengzhu," the critic Wumazi says that unlike Mozi, he is unable to bring himself to practice *jian'ai* (46/52-55), implying that *jian'ai* isn't so much as impossible, but too demanding for all but the very few.

11 A similar move is recorded in a passage of the *Mozi*, in which the critic Wumazi 巫馬子 told *Mozi*: "I am different from you. I am unable (*bu-neng*) to be concerned about the welfare of everyone without distinction (*jian'ai*)." I take it that his point is not merely that he is unable to do something, but that this inability, being grounded in putatively unalterable facts about his psychology, somehow counts as a rejoinder to Mozi's urging that people ought to practice *jian'ai* (46/52-55).

that they do not understand the concept *yi* and its negation, but that while willing and able to acknowledge the criminality of lesser instances of *bu-yi*, they fail to deem as *bu-yi* the worst instance of all—military aggression. This failure is shown by the fact that they not only fail to condemn military aggression, they even praise and record the warlike deeds of the rulers for posterity (17/9-11). In a similar vein, the Mohists complain that the war-loving rulers "do not know" that their actions are *bu-renyi*, or *bu-ren bu-yi* (28/50-55). Again, this is not a bloodless note that someone failed to know that such and such is the case, but an indictment against a failure to understand something that one *should* understand and in accordance with which one *should* act. As the text puts it, the war-loving rulers are "perverse" (*bei* 悖; 19/28; see 28-30).[12]

With the above in mind, we are in a better position to make sense of a recurring motif in the core chapters of the *Mozi*. The text repeatedly ascribes certain high-minded desires to the social and political elite. I am referring to claims to the effect that "if the gentlemen of the world, or rulers and ministers truly desire. . ., they ought to pay close attention to the proposals that we (the Mohists) have been making." A catalogue of what goes into the ". . ." reveals a rather high-minded portrayal of this group of people: "to practice *renyi*, to be superior men of service, to be in accord with the way of the sage kings above, and with what is beneficial to the ruling houses and the masses below" (10/47, 13/58-59, 19/63-64, 25/86-87, 28/71-72; cf. 27/1, 37/45); "to follow the Way and benefit the common people (27/72-73; cf. 16/86); "to promote what is beneficial to the world and eliminate what is harmful to the world" (19/62-63, 31/107, 32/49, 37/44; cf. 15/1, 16/1 and 25/12-16); and "to enrich the world and abhor its poverty, and desire that the world be orderly" (15/41-42, 35/46-47).

At the risk of some oversimplification, let us say that the Mohists present themselves as addressing members of the elite who *ostensibly* care that *yi* prevails in the world and who desire to conduct themselves in a manner required by *yi*. Now, just to be clear, I am not assuming that the Mohist texts were themselves presented to such an audience. The more probable hypothesis is that the chapters served primarily

12 See also 46/46, 47/29-30 and Xunzi 11/116-117.

for the internal use of the Mohist community, e.g., for the teaching of its members and as a record of the community's doctrines. But presumably, part of the point of the writings is that members of the community can, in suitable contexts, address the *arguments* therein to the rulers, ministers, and gentlemen of the world (see also 49/61-64).

In other words, the Mohists' present members of that indirect audience—an important and intended *recipient group* for their ideas, let us say—as at least implicitly acknowledging that they *ought* to have a desire to conduct themselves as required by *yi*, and that they would be in a bad way if they were not to have such a desire. The Mohists probably thought that many members of this group would at least *verbally* agree that a course of action being *yi* is a weighty consideration in its favor, and the same being *bu-yi* is a very serious consideration against it. Incidentally, this does not imply that the Mohists believed people possess some sort of ethical predisposition to act in accordance with the dictates of *yi*. They only need people to be willing to concede that *yi* is *supposed to* link up with motivation and practical deliberation in a certain way, regardless of whether they are truly motivated to act in accordance with *yi*.

But having said all that, it seems rather doubtful that the Mohists were only interested in *verbal* agreement. Presumably, they expected some substantial "payoff" for making the case for their practical proposals explicitly in terms of *yi* or *renyi* or "*ren* and *yi*" or "what the *renren* or *renzhe* would do." The Mohists probably did assume that at least some intended recipients of their arguments really do have a desire to conduct themselves according to the dictates of *yi*. For such people, what is needed is that they be convinced that the Mohists' Way is truly the Way of *yi*. But what about those whose commitment to *yi* is less deep? One part of the answer is suggested by the role that *yi* plays within the matrix of social and political life (Section V). A second part brings into focus certain features of Mohist religion and the role that Heaven and its supernatural agents play in upholding the sway of *yi* in the world (Section VI).

V. The Functional Role of *Yi* in Social and Political Life

Even if someone does not care for *yi* in such a way that he is ready to act for the sake of *yi*, he would very likely still desire the *reputation* that he conducts himself according to *yi*. This is because there are rewards that come with such a reputation. Conversely, it can be *imprudent* for him to openly declare his disdain for *yi* or to behave in a brazen fashion since such a course of action invites the untoward attention of other people. To unpack these observations, we need to take a closer look at the social and political dimensions of *yi*.

On this issue, the "Shangtong" triad of chapters is especially revealing.[13] The chapters posit that there was a complete absence of rulers and leaders (i.e., social-political authority and its apparatus of control) in a pre-historic state of nature. Consequently, people had different and conflicting views about *yi* on account of which they fight.[14] The conclusion is that a unified view of *yi* that is consistently enforced by a hierarchy of rulers and leaders is a necessary condition for social and political order (11/22, 12/30-31 and 13/41-42) since people having different views of *yi* leads to conflict and fighting. But why would people be in conflict or fight if they hold different views of *yi*?

At first approximation, let us say that the sort of "different people having different views about *yi*" at issue here requires that the agents involved make conflicting judgments over some range of issues. That is, there are at least some x such that, while A judges x to be *yi* (based on his view of *yi*), B judges it to be *bu-yi* (based on her view of *yi*).[15] Now consider what "Shangtong" C says will happen when the

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13 For a more detailed analysis of the passages in "Shangtong," see Loy (2005, 141-58).

14 Note that "Shangtong" speaks simply of people's *yi*—though the context clearly implies that it is their views about *yi* that is at stake. Relatedly, an agent's view of *yi*, if verbalized, would be a *yan* that he holds to. In "Gengzhu," *Mozi* refers to Wumazi's statements delineating and justifying his mode of conduct as the latter's *yi* (see 46/55, 56, 58-60).

15 While this proposal is faithful to the text, it does reveal that the Mohists probably overstated the point. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, given the way things are set up, "it will be almost impossible for two people to share the same [view] of *yi* since it's almost practically impossible for two people to agree on the moral evaluation of every single action. Not even two strongly committed Roman

social-political superiors and those subordinated to them do not share the same view of *yi* (13/18-22; see also 12/54-61). To summarize, the passage basically says that when that happens, the same person may be thought good and praised or rewarded by the rulers while condemned by the common people. Conversely, the same person may be thought evil and punished by the authorities, while receiving the approval of the common people. When all this happens, the text goes on to say, the rulers are unable to govern the people, and order will not be achieved.

So, as far as the Mohists are concerned, part of what it means for A and B to have the same view of *yi* is for them to consider the same sorts of words and actions (and, by extension, the people who say or do these things) to be good (*shan* 善), fit for approval (*shi* 是), worthy of praise (*yu* 譽) or reward (*shang* 賞); or not good, i.e., bad (*bu-shan* 不善), fit for disapproval (or condemnation; *fei* 非), worthy of blame (*hui* 毀) or punishment (*fa* 罰). And to the extent that they do not agree, they do not share the same view of *yi*. What this means is that, for the Mohists, people's judgments about what things are *yi* or *bu-yi* are bound up with the reactive attitudes and the outwardly or social expressions of these attitudes, and beyond that, judgments about retributive sanctions and, in suitable contexts, even the disposition to inflict such sanctions. This adds an additional dimension to the character of *yi* than so far mentioned: *yi* connects with the distribution of praise, blame, approval, disapproval, punishment, reward—some of the most significant burdens and benefits of human favor, so to speak. These connections also explain why people fight with each other in the Mohist state of nature—they are not presented as fighting over the use of limited resources. Conversely, the argument of the "Shangtong" chapters is exactly that a collective is well governed and in a good order when it gets its act together on such matters and offers a consistent response from all sections of society.

Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, or Orthodox Jews will share [the same view] of *yi*, on this construal." This is a fair criticism of what the Mohists are saying. But it need not be a fatal objection if the Mohists' account can be reformulated in terms of *degrees* of similarity and differences between views of *yi*.

Given the above, it is now clearer as to why it would be desirable for someone to have the reputation that he conducts himself according to the dictates of *yi*, or why it might be imprudent for someone to openly declare his disdain for *yi* or to act in a fashion brazenly contrary to *yi*. On the one hand, someone who brazenly conducts himself in a *bu-yi* manner (as judged by people around him) can expect the untoward attention of other people—attention that ranges from the disapproval of peers to punishment at the hands of the public powers. On the other hand, someone seen as conducting himself according to the dictates of *yi* avoids such negative attention and treatment, secures his position as a member of the community in good standing, and even stands to reap the approval, praises, or more substantial rewards from those around him.

The "Shangtong" account thus tells us quite a bit about the intended functional role of *yi* in social and political life. In the ideal situation, the requirements of *yi* would be backed by the full weight of social approval and sanctions of the public powers. This is a connection that is also brought out in the Mohists' equation of the prevalence of *yi* with good governance (*shanzheng* 善政; 27/3). In fact, for the Mohists, the prevalence of *yi* is constitutive of healthy social and political life not just within the local community, but in the world as a whole. In the "Tianzhi" chapters (26.3-4, 27.1-2, 28.3-4), the Mohists present the world as forming an ecumenical hierarchy with Heaven (*tian* 天) at the apex, followed by the Son of Heaven, the various princes and officials, and then the common people at large.[16] The earlier mentioned equivalence between *yi* prevailing in the world and the world being well governed is presented by the Mohists within such a context, thus suggesting that for them, the norms associated with *yi* are meant to have ecumenical scope and ideally govern the conduct of the human collective as a whole.

From the discussion of this section, it might be tempting to conclude that for the Mohists, people are generally moved to con-

[16] The picture is likely an idealized vision of the early Zhou that became prevalent in Chinese history: ". . . The Zhou had given China . . . a vision: a vision of a world, 'all under heaven,' united in peace and harmony and cooperation, under 'the son of Heaven.'" See Creel (1970, 1:441).

duct themselves in accordance with *yi* due to external rewards or punishments rather than by their recognition that an action is *yi* or *bu-yi*. If this is right, then it *might* seem as if there is a significant difference between the Mohists and Confucians: the Confucians would assert that one should act for the sake of *yi*, while in contrast, the Mohists say or imply that the motive does not really matter so long as the behavior is right.[17] Now, the Mohists certainly give this impression in their writings sometimes.[18] But strictly speaking, the evidence presented does not necessitate such a conclusion. What it does imply is that the Mohists are keen to ensure even those who are not already committed to act in accordance with *yi* for the sake of *yi* are accounted for in their doctrines. After all, one can *both* assert that one ought to do the morally right thing for its own sake *and* notice that moral practices serve an important functional role in regulating social life, partly through the way they regulate the distribution of praise and blame, punishment, and reward.

VI. *Yi* and Mohist Religion

As mentioned previously, getting clear on the role that *yi* plays within the matrix of social and political life gives us *part* of an answer to the earlier posed problem regarding how considerations of *yi* could motivate people who are not already inclined to act for the sake of *yi* to conduct themselves in accordance with what is right. The Mohists' ideal that *yi* governs the conduct of the human collective highlights a further issue they face with respect to the most egregious case of all: Why should mere social disapproval move a powerful war-loving ruler bent on military aggression? Furthermore, the fear of punishment at the hands of the public powers doesn't apply, since, in this case, the ruler is the public power. The demands of *yi* extends beyond what is under the criminal justice system of a local community to the arena between princes and principalities, an arena

17 Credit to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.
18 See Loy (2013, 234-35).

unchecked by human powers capable of enforcing the dictates of *yi* (ever since the passing of the ancient sage rulers). But we hardly have to go that far. Even within the local community, it is entirely possible for the public powers to fail to enforce the dictates of *yi* or to do worse. The Mohists are fairly explicit that the behavior of the rulers and gentlemen of the world often falls short of *yi* (26/42-43, 28/45-46). But what compels these rulers and gentlemen to change their ways, to conform their conduct to the dictates of *yi*? Once again, mere "social disapproval" or "fear of punishment" are not always compelling reasons in their case. More generally, given a manifest imbalance of power between individuals and groups, some—the stronger, more numerous, more crafty—can and regularly will get away with murder (see 15/9, 16/1-3).

It must be pointed out that it is not a deep criticism of the Mohists' doctrine that some people—sociopathic war-loving rulers (19/28-30), for instance—are unmoved by considerations of *yi*. All that at best implies is that there exist unreasonable people in the world, and sometimes, they are even very powerful people.[19] Put another way, considerations of *yi* are *supposed to* play an important role in people's deliberation and govern social and political interactions of people—but to say that is to highlight *yi* as a *regulative ideal*, not to claim that *yi* already prevails in the world. Nonetheless, there is at least one more arrow in the Mohists' quiver that bears attention.

As mentioned early on (Section I), there is a religious dimension to Mohism. The argument of the "Tianzhi" chapters is that the will of Heaven forms the ultimate foundation to *yi* and functions as an epistemic guide to figuring out what is and what is not *yi*. More relevant to the current issue, however, is the insistence by the text that the sway of *yi* is upheld by the supernatural agents of Heaven—the ghosts and spirits. "Tianzhi A" opens with the charge that the gentlemen of the world understand only trifles but not things of

[19] Here, I can do no better than quote this anecdote from Toulmin (1953, 165n2): "I recall a conversation with Bertrand Russell in which he remarked, as an objection to [my] account of ethics, that it would not have convinced Hitler. But whoever supposed that it should? We do not prescribe logic as a treatment for lunacy, or expect philosophers to produce panaceas for psychopaths."

importance. On the one hand, they know full well to refrain from wrongful behavior for fear that they will attract the untoward attention of various human peers and superiors, and thus sought to dissuade one another from bad behavior by reminding them of the same. (In other words, it is as if the gentlemen of the world endorsed the reasoning considered in Section V above.) And yet, on the other hand, they fail to mention the most important superior capable of meting out punishment for infractions and from which there is no place to hide: Heaven (see 26/1-9; see also 27/45-46 and 28/1-7).

Elsewhere, in "Minggui," the Mohists took pains to present arguments for the existence of providential ghosts and spirits capable of and concerned to reward the good and punish the wicked, despite the open skepticism of the elite. The chapter goes so far as to say that the world has lost its grip on *yi* since the demise of the ancient sage kings, and the princes now take might as right, because people have become skeptical regarding the ghosts and spirits (31/1-6). The chapter also includes accounts regarding how ghosts and spirits visited various people in history, from ministers, to princes, and to sage kings, to punish the wicked, lend aid to the good, and legitimize the overthrow of despots. And in "Feigong C," having offered some arguments against the morality and profitability of military aggression, the text considers the retort that the ancient sage kings, those models of *yi* conduct, also conducted offensive military campaigns. The Mohists reply is that there is a crucial moral distinction between their military campaigns and military aggression. But, curiously, the main criterion of difference explicitly discussed in the passage is that supernatural signs and omens were given to the sage kings, legitimizing their military activities.[20] In short, it is part of the Mohists' picture of the world that the sway of *yi* is grounded in the authority of an impartial Heaven and supported by the supernatural agency of ghosts and spirits.

The point here is not that the modern audience should be convinced by the Mohists' arguments regarding the existence and providential character of the ghosts and spirits, only that the Mohists do

[20] For a more detailed discussion of the relevant passages in "Feigong C" and "Minggui," see Wong and Loy (2004, 345-57), Van Els (2013), and Sterckx (2013).

seem to take this line of reasoning extremely seriously. Nonetheless, a couple of caveats are in order. First, if the impression is given that the Mohists put forward their notions regarding Heaven and spirits cynically, i.e., not because they believe any of it but only because it is a possible solution to the problem of motivating people towards conduct becoming of *yi*, it is unintended. As far as I can tell, the Mohists seem to be sincere believers in the existence and character of the ghosts and spirits, and beyond that, their picture of Heaven. All this is compatible with their *also* affirming that people who believe in the existence and character of the ghosts and spirits have an incentive to be careful about their behavior, and consequently, that there is every reason to propagate those beliefs *even if* only to encourage more people to conform their behavior to the demands of *yi*. Second, we should also keep in mind that the Mohists were operating within a context in which the social and political elites who were part of the intended recipients of their arguments were avowedly skeptical regarding Heaven and the spirits (31/4-7).[21] This means that in appealing to Heaven and the ghosts and spirits to motivate behavior becoming of *yi*, the Mohists did not see themselves as tapping into existing religious sentiments. If anything, it is rather more likely that theirs was a project of *rehabilitating* what they considered to be religious notions inherited from the early Zhou, notions which have of late lost ground among the social and political elite of the day.

The influence of the Mohists' religious notions on their conception of *yi* goes beyond the above. Recall that the state of the world in which *yi* prevails—which is also one in which good order and good governance obtains, and the world's welfare is promoted—is described as one in which Heaven rules at the apex of the world hierarchy. Furthermore, the text would sometimes talk about its proposed way of conduct as one that is meant to "benefit Heaven above, the spirits in the middle, and human beings below" (10/27, 19/1-4, 26/37-38, 40, 28/37-38, 41-42, 36/45). Now, we need not see this as conflicting with the earlier point that, for the Mohists, *yi* is to be understood in terms of certain norms that are meant to constrain and govern how

21 For more background, see also Pines (2002, 55).

individuals and groups ought to treat other individuals and groups, such that when they comply, the world will be well ordered, and its welfare promoted (Section III). When the Mohists expand on how a course of action benefits or harms Heaven and the spirits, they tend to spell things out in terms of it benefiting or harming human beings. For instance, military aggression harms Heaven and the spirits because it leads to the killing of people who could otherwise be offering sacrifices to Heaven and the spirits (19/16-18). There is no suggestion that the Mohists conceived of benefiting Heaven and the spirits without any reference whatsoever to the consequences for human welfare. Nonetheless, the main conclusion is that, at the very least, more than human stake holders are involved in the world's being in good order, well governed, and its welfare promoted.

VII. Concluding Remarks

The study began with the thought that the Mohists sought to offer a solution to the perceived chaos of the world by articulating, advocating, and defending a Way that, if adopted and put into practice by individuals and communities, is meant to restore good order to the world. If the account presented in this study is on the mark, we can now add to the above picture the observation that the Mohists' ethical concern—as it is articulated via their account of *yi*—is much more *restricted* when compared with something that (in principle) answers the more general question: What is the best or most desirable way for individuals and communities to conduct their affairs, a way that is best and desirable not only for "us Mohists," but in some sense for everyone? Rather, the question that the Mohists have in mind seems to be more like: What are the appropriate norms that individuals and communities ought to live by, that ideally are enforced by the weight of social sanctions and the public powers, that are meant to constrain how individuals and groups treat other individuals and groups as they pursue their own goals, and that govern the distribution of the benefits and burdens of human favor (exemplified in such things as praise and blame, approval and disapproval, reward and punish-

ment)? When people comply with such norms, they would be able to at least peacefully coexist if not enjoy mutual benefit, and beyond that, the world would be in good order, well governed, and its welfare promoted. Furthermore, these norms are to be distinguished from rules of mere custom and are supposed to present motivations for action. They are norms in light of which the people's behavior (often such behavior involves the potentially harmful treatment of others) may be measured or criticized, against which one's own treatment of others is to be justified or defended.

The province of *yi* as it is presented in my discussion above is close to what Gerald Gaus called "social morality," citing a distinction proposed by Peter Strawson and Kurt Baier. As Gaus explains, "the rules of social morality structure social interaction in ways that are beneficial to all and make social existence possible; social morality lays down requirements (including prohibitions) that are to direct people's social interactions." So construed, "social morality" is distinguished from the larger region of morality "which includes visions of what makes life worth living and what constitutes a noble or virtuous life." (2010, 3) Purely as a heuristic, I suggest that the Mohists' concern is functionally equivalent to what we would call a concern with *justice* understood as an aspect of social morality.

I must also stress that by that, I am *not* saying that the term "*yi*" should be translated as "justice," "that which is just," and so on. What I am suggesting is that the *subject matter* of the Mohists' ethical concern, or the sorts of issues about which their doctrine is meant to address and which motivates their social activism are akin to issues that non-philosophers raise when talking about "justice"—"social justice," when applied within a local community; "justice between states," when applied between states; "global justice" when applied to the world as a whole. But my use of the term "justice" is purely a heuristic; Nothing substantive in the study turned on it. It is but a way to make vivid to us—moderns living in a milieu remote from the world of the Warring States—the issues and concerns that motivated the Mohists' thinking and acting.

The contrast between "social morality" and the larger wider region of morality does offer a potential way for us to deepen our under-

standing of the difference between the Mohists and their Confucian rivals. The point cannot be defended at length here (since it will require a closer examination of the Confucian sources), but the impression is that the contrast between them is not just a matter of their having *different answers to the same questions.* Rather, at some level, they *were answering distinct* (*even if related*) *questions.* Indeed, the ancient Confucians were interested in "the rules of social morality that structure social interaction in ways that are beneficial to all and make social existence possible." But unlike the Mohists, the Confucians' interest in social morality is either more readily subsumed within a larger vision about "what makes life worth living and what constitutes a noble or virtuous life," or at the very least, it is at best one concern among other irreducible concerns. Even regarding the domain of social morality, the Mohists are also more ready to ascend to an *objective* rather than an *inter-subjective* perspective. For them, *yi* is not just about what you or I ought to do (possibly to or with each other), but often about what *overall agent-neutral outcomes* social and political arrangements ought to aim at—related to the Consequentialism of their doctrine so often noticed. But as I said, I will not be able to defend these points at length here.

Note that while the Mohists' *conception* of *yi* as it is spelt out in the core chapters of the *Mozi* (i.e., their account of what is required by *yi*) may well be distinctive and controversial, the underlying *concept* of *yi* is not wholly unique to them. The ramifications of *yi* in the economy of human life as the Mohists assumed them are probably implicit in widely shared notions from the common world of discourse in their intellectual-historical milieu.[22] After all, identifying the *subject matter* of the Mohists' ethical concern or the *sorts* of issues about which their doctrine is meant to address does not imply that other thinkers are not concerned about the same subject matter, even if they have drastically different responses. In fact, the sorts of issues about which the Mohists are concerned, in all probability, overlap with those

[22] In distinguishing between the *concept* of *yi*, and the Mohists' *conception* of *yi*—which is one specific and potentially controversial conception among many—I am drawing upon Rawls' (1999, 5) point about "the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice."

about which their rivals are concerned. This is a precondition of any meaningful disagreement between the various disputers of the Way.

What would be controversial and open to criticism, however, is the Mohists' nearly exclusive emphasis on *yi* in articulating what makes for good order in the world. By this, I do not mean the mere fact that the Mohists appear mainly interested in the issue of *yi* rather than other things. After all, the mere fact that A is concerned about topic X does not, by itself, imply that she is thereby open to criticism from B who is concerned about another topic Y, or from C who is concerned about both X and Y. But it is another thing altogether for the Mohist to slide from their near exclusive attention on *yi*, to taking the position that *yi* constitutes the sum of what makes for good order in the world, that considerations of *yi* trump all other ethical considerations, or that other ethical considerations are all ultimately derivative of *yi*. This is tantamount to thinking that an answer to the more restricted question exhausts the answer to the more expansive question regarding how individuals and communities might best conduct their affairs. Yet this is the very impression sometimes given by the Mohists' writings in general, and by their explicitly claiming that "of the myriad things there is nothing more honorable (or valuable) than *yi*" (47/1).

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