



GenEd1091



Week 4 The *Mozi*

GenEd1091: Classical Chinese Philosophy and Political Theory



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Share your favorite passage from the *Mozi*



Credit to Dalle-3

Suffering of Common People in Mozi's Time (Warring States Period, 5th–4th Century BCE)

During the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), when the philosopher Mozi (Mo Di, c. 470–391 BCE) lived, China was fragmented into rival states. This era was marked by social upheaval and relentless warfare. Ordinary people—peasants, laborers, and artisans—bore the brunt of these turbulent times. They endured harsh economic conditions, the devastation of war, and an oppressive social order. Mozi's teachings directly responded to these conditions, advocating ethical reforms to alleviate suffering. This report examines the plight of the common people in Mozi's time and how Mozi's philosophy sought to address their suffering.

Widespread Poverty: Peasants typically lived hand-to-mouth. Starvation and malnutrition were constant threats, and historical records note that in Mozi's era, both war and famines were common.

Heavy Taxation: Peasants labored under burdensome taxes and rents imposed by rulers and landlords. States in the Warring States period demanded a significant portion of a farmer's harvest to fund their courts and armies. These taxes, often paid in grain or labor, meant that even in good years much of a peasant's production went to the state or aristocracy, not his own family.

Wealth Disparities: There was a stark gap between the wealthy elite and the peasant masses. A small aristocratic class controlled most of the land and resources, while the majority had very little. Nobles and high officials lived in relative luxury, supported by the toil of commoners.



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Theme 1: Textual style



How are Mozi's arguments presented? How does this relate to his philosophical message? What are Mozi's standards for what makes a good argument?



Theme 1: Textual style



How does the style of argumentation in the Mozi differ from that of the Analects?
What are the implications of these differences?



Theme 2: Effective ways to motivate behavior

According to the Mozi, what are the most effective ways to motivate behavior? By implication, what is Mozi's conception of humans?

 **Hint:** What's Mozi's idea for incentivizing ethical behavior in chapter 8 "Honoring the Worthy"?



Theme 2: Effective ways to motivate behavior

Chapter 8 Honoring the Worthy

“The kings, dukes, and great officials who now rule the various states all want their states to be wealthy, their populations great, and their administrations orderly, and yet instead of wealth they get poverty, instead of great populations they get meager ones, and instead of order they get chaos.” What is the reason for this?

Our teacher Mozi says, “This is because the kings, dukes, and great officials who rule the various states are not able to honor the worthy and employ the capable in carrying out their rule. And so in a state where there are many worthy men, good order will be secure, and in a state where there are few worthy men good order will be tenuous. This is why it is the proper work of kings, dukes, and great officers to increase the number of worthy men in their states.” Since this is the case, what is the best way to increase the number of worthy men?

Our teacher Mozi says, “It is analogous to the case of wanting to increase the number of good archers or charioteers in one’s state. One must reward and esteem them, revere and praise them; then one can succeed in increasing the number of good archers or charioteers in one’s state. How much more should this be done in the case of worthy men—those who are well versed in virtuous conduct, discriminating in discussion, and broadly knowledgeable! ...”

Theme 2: Effective ways to motivate behavior



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How does this view contrast with the Analects?



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Theme 3: Impartial Caring



What's Mozi's definition of impartial caring?



Theme 3: Impartial Caring



Our teacher Mozi says, “If people regarded other people’s states in the same way that they regard their own, who then would incite their own state to attack that of another? For one would do for others as one would do for oneself. If people regarded other people’s cities in the same way that they regard their own, who then would incite their own city to attack that of another? For one would do for others as one would do for oneself. If people regarded other people’s families in the same way that they regard their own, who then would incite their own family to attack that of another? For one would do for others as one would do for oneself. And so if states and cities do not attack one another and families do not wreak havoc upon and steal from one another, would this be a harm to the world or a benefit? Of course one must say it is a benefit to the world.”

...

This is why our teacher Mozi says, “I approve of impartiality. Moreover, earlier I said that, ‘The business of a benevolent person is to promote what is beneficial to the world and eliminate what is harmful.’ And now I have shown that impartiality gives rise to all the great benefits in the world and that partiality gives rise to all the great harms in the world.”



Theme 3: Impartial Caring

The person who maintains partiality would say, 'How can I possibly regard the wellbeing of my friends as I do my own well-being? How can I regard the parents of my friends as I do my own parents?' So when his friends are hungry, the partial person does not feed them.

The impartial person says, 'I have heard that in order to be a superior person in the world, one must regard the well-being of one's friends as one regards one's own well-being; one must regard the parents of one's friends as one regards one's own parents.' And so when the impartial person's friends are hungry, he feeds them.

Would one prefer that they be in the care of an impartial person or would one prefer that they be in the care of a partial person?



Theme 4: A Condemnation of Aggressive War

Killing an innocent person, stripping him of his clothes and taking his spear and sword is even more wrong than entering his stable and stealing his horses and cattle. Why? Because more is taken from others. If more is taken from others, it is even more inhumane and a more serious crime. Up to this point, all the gentlemen of the world know well enough to condemn such actions and declare that they are wrong. But when it comes to the great wrong of attacking another state, they do not know enough to condemn it. Rather, they praise this and declare that it is the right thing to do. Can they be said to understand the difference between right and wrong?



Theme 5: A Condemnation of Musical Performances

The present use of musical instruments imposes three hardships upon the people.

Because of the expenditures involved in producing such instruments, those who are hungry are unable to get food, those who are cold are unable to obtain clothing, and those who toil are not afforded a chance to rest. These are the three greatest hardships upon the people. And so our teacher Mozi says, “Musical performances are wrong!”

...

These days, when kings, dukes, and great men put on musical performances, they divert such vast resources that could be used to produce food and clothing for the people. (107)

The Chime Bells of Marquis Yi of Zeng



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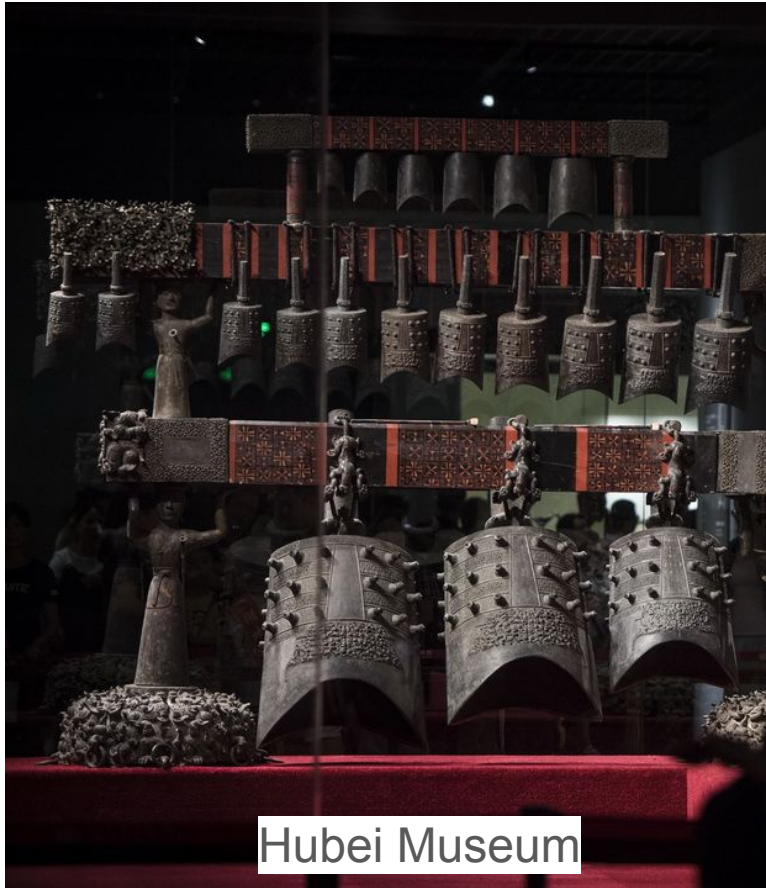


Hubei Museum

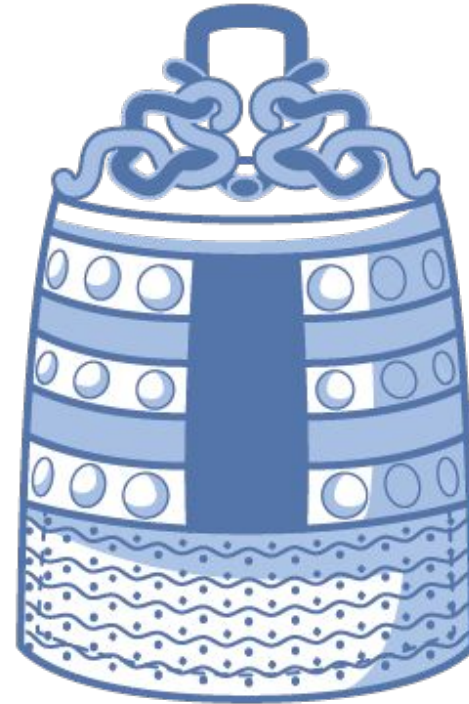
The Chime Bells of Marquis Yi of Zeng



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Hubei Museum



Credit to Queenie Luo

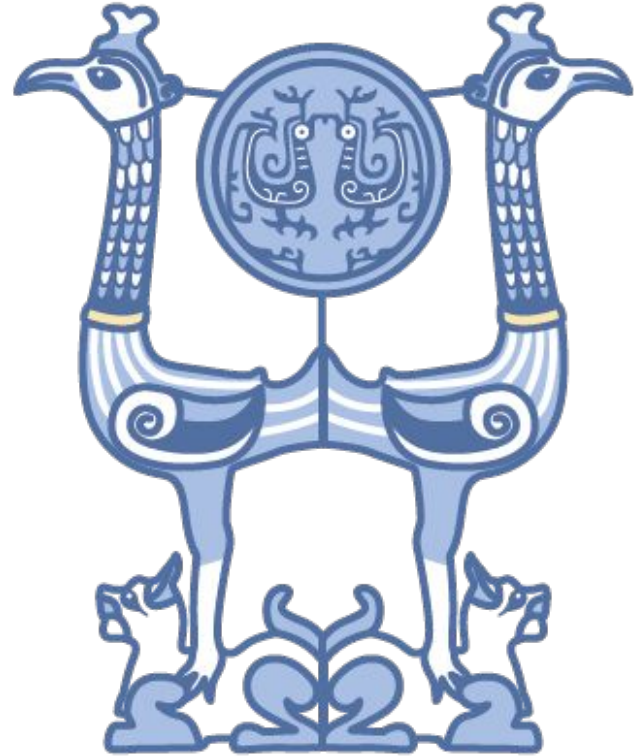
Tiger-Base Phoenix-Frame Drum of Marquis Yi of Zeng



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Hubei Museum



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Theme 6: For Moderation in Expenditures

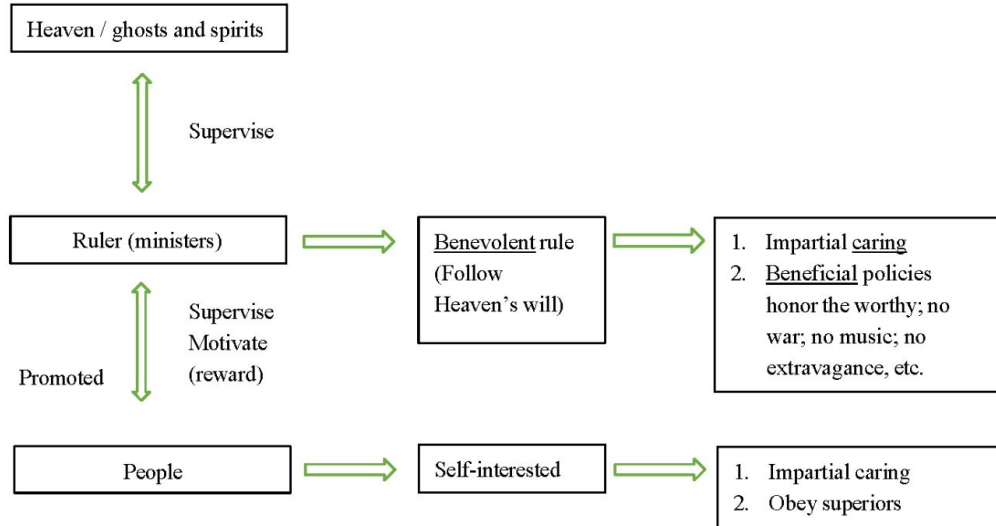
What is the purpose of boats and vehicles? Vehicles are used to travel over land and boats are used to travel over water such that one can bring together and exchange what is beneficial throughout the world. In making these various things, sage-kings never add anything that is not useful. And so they never waste their resources or overburden their people yet are able to generate great benefits.

The rulers overwork and overtax their people to the point where many lack sufficient resources, with the result that those who die of hunger and cold are more than one can count. Moreover, the great officers encourage rulers to raise armies and attack neighboring states. In this way the population is reduced.

This is why our teacher Mozi says, “To eliminate everything that is not useful is to carry out the Way of the sage-kings and offer great benefit to the world.”



Mozi's political structure



What kind of society?

- a. Well-supervised and highly-motivated
- b. Hierarchical but impartial and meritocratic (supposedly)
- c. "Economically rational"

What is the downside of this society?

- d. People become Pavlovianed (unconditionally submissive).
- e. The coexistence of self-interestedness and impartiality seems impractical.
- f. The supervision of Heaven/ ghosts and spirits is not as reliable as Mozi argues, which undermines the supposedly meritocratic nature of the system.

	Confucius	Mozi
Ghosts and spirits		
Funeral		
Expenditures		
Music		



Post a reflection on Ed

- Prompt: Apply **one** concept from the *Mozi* to a real-world scenario and share your thoughts. You may either agree or disagree with Mozi's ideas. For example, Mozi's critique of music can be applied to thinking through XYZ. Mozi's critique is convincing/unconvincing because of XYZ.
- Post it on Ed Discussion under "Sections" and "Week 4 Mozi"
- Submit the link of your post under Assignment
- If you can't finish it by the end of the section, please finish it by the end of the day.