Chinese Philosophy - Homework 6.

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Text

Mozi said: Some standard of judgment must be established. To expound a doctrine without regard to the standard is similar to determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel. By this means the distinction of right and wrong, benefit and harm, cannot be known. Therefore there must be three tests. What are the three tests? Mozi said: Its basis, its verifiability, and its applicability. How is it to be based? It should be based on the deeds of the ancient sage-kings. How is it to be verified? It is to be verified by the senses of hearing and sight of the common people. How is it to be applied? It is to be applied by adopting it in government and observing its benefits to the country and the people. This is what is meant by the three tests of every doctrine.

(Mozi)

Comments

The text above is a very clear example of the stark differences between Mozi's philosophy and Daoism. Daoism is relativist and uses the abstract concept of the *Dao* as its foundation, while Mozi tries to be more down-to-earth and grounded in facts. While Zhuangzi claims that everything can be considered true based on one's perspective, Mozi argues that we can build our systems of thought on objectively verifiable tests.

The first test Mozi claims we should use to verify any doctrine is its *basis*. Where does this doctrine come from? Is it grounded in history, being a result of generations of wisdom combined, or is it an ad-hoc, artificial system? Mozi would certainly not consider the abstract reasoning reducing the world to the *Dao* sufficient ground.

The second test is that of verifiability. As Mozi claims, artificial systems of thought are not to be accepted unless they are verifiable using our senses. The basic idea here is, do not accept ideas in stark contrast with your common sense, or at least be careful about accepting them.

The third test is applicability. Mozi is not a fan of inventing ideas for ideas' sake. Every system of thought gains its value by its applicability. Here he talks about applicability in governance, but one could argue that a doctrine that is useless to the emperor but can help people live a happier life might also pass this test.

In conclusion, Mozi's philosophy has a very pragmatic approach to how we should judge the truth of a doctrine. While this down-to-earth approach might be too simplistic to be applied to all valuable ideologies, it is definitely a good starting ground for someone about to evaluate a doctrine.