MOZI: UNIVERSAL LOVE ("Jian'ai" 兼愛)

The translation here is from Burton Watson's Mozi: Selected Writings*, with minor changes. This presentation arranges the text into sections and adds commentary.*

I. The Basic Premise: Partiality as the Root of Harm

Mozi says: "It is the business of the benevolent man of ren to try to promote whatever brings welfare to the world and to eliminate whatever brings harm."

Now in this age, what is it that brings the greatest harm to the world? Great states attacking small ones, great families overthrowing small ones, the strong coercing the weak, the many tyrannizing the few, the clever deceiving the foolish, the eminent domineering the humble–these all bring harm to the world. So also do rulers who are not generous, ministers who are disloyal, fathers who do not show their children kindness, and sons who are unfilial. And nowadays there are base people who assault and injure one another with weapons, knives, poison, fire, and water.

When we inquire into the cause of these various harms, what do we find has produced them? Do we find that they are the product of people loving others and trying to benefit them? No, we must answer, certainly not! They come from hating others and trying to injure them. And when we set out to classify and describe those men who hate and injure others, do we find that their actions are motivated by universality or partiality? Surely, we must say, by partiality. It is this partiality in their dealings that gives rise to all the great harms in the world. Therefore we can conclude that partiality is wrong.

> In this opening section, the Mohist writers support Mozi's opening claim through strictly reasoned argument, not far distant from the style of argument that characterized early Greek philosophical writing, which was generally cast as an appeal to reason.

II. The Prescription for Change: Universality as the Formula for Goodness

Mozi says, "Whoever criticizes others must have some alternative to offer them." To criticize and yet offer no alternative is like trying to stop a flood with flood waters or put out fire with fire. Surely, it will be of no use.

It is for this reason that Mozi has specified, "Partiality should be replaced with universality."

But how can partiality be replaced with universality? If men were to regard the states of others as they regard their own state, then who would incite his state to attack another? It would be like attacking his own. If men were to regard the cities of others as they regard

their own, then who would incite his city to attack another? It would be like attacking his own. If men were to regard the families of others as they regard their own, then who would incite his family to overthrow another? It would be like overthrowing his own. When states and cities do not attack and make war on one another and families and individuals do not overthrow or injure one another, is this a harm to the world or a benefit? Surely, it is a benefit!

When we inquire into the cause of such benefits, what do we find has brought them about? Is it hating others and trying to injure them? Surely not! They come from loving others and trying to benefit them. And when we set out to classify and describe those men who love and benefit others, do we find that their actions are motivated by universality or partiality? Surely, we must say, by universality. It is this universality in their dealings that gives rise to all the great benefits in the world. This is why Mozi has said that universality is right.

[First general conclusion:] We said initially that it is the business of the benevolent man of ren to try to promote whatever brings welfare to the world and to eliminate whatever brings harm. Now we have demonstrated that universality is the source of all the great benefits of the world and partiality is the source of all the great harms. It is for this reason that Mozi says: "Partiality is wrong and universality is right."

Now if we seek to benefit the world by taking universality as our standard, those with sharp ears and clear eyes will see and hear for others, those with sturdy limbs will work for others, those with a knowledge of the Dao will endeavor to teach others. Then those who are old and without wives and children will find means of support and be able to live out their days, and the young and orphaned who have no parents will find people to care for them and look after their needs.

When all these benefits may be secured merely by taking universality as our standard, I cannot understand how people can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it!

> The *power* of reason is grasped by the Mohists as by no one else in early China. To Mohists, for whom these arguments would have seemed air tight, the force of rational proof seems to have allowed for no doubt whatever–a habit of mind shared by many later Western thinkers, and surely a necessary attitude for people who would wish to emulate the sacrifice of Fu Tun, described in the section on the Mohist school.

And yet there are those in the world who do continue to criticize it. "It may be a good thing," they say, "but how could it ever be put into practice?"

> Good reasoners do not stop at offering positive arguments. An argument is not complete until all objections are anticipated and refuted, and the *Mozi* now engages in this sophisticated turn of reasoning.

III. The First Argument of Practicability: The Personal Level

Mozi says, "If a thing cannot be put into practice even I would criticize it. But how can there be a good thing that cannot be put into practice?"

Let us try considering both sides of the question. Suppose there are two men, one holding to partiality and the other to universality. The believer in partiality would say, "How could I possibly regard my friend as I do myself, or my friend's father in the same way as my own?" Because he views his friend in this way, he will not feed him when he is hungry, clothe him when he is cold, nourish him when he is sick, or bury him when he dies. Such are the words of the man of partiality, and such too are his actions.

But the words and actions of the universally minded man are not like this. He will say, "I have heard that the truly superior man regards his friend as the same as himself and his friend's father as he does his own. Only if he is like this can he be considered a truly superior man." Because he views his friend in this way, he will feed him when he is hungry, clothe him when he is cold, nourish him when he is sick, and bury him when he dies. Such are the words and actions of the man of universality.

Thus do the words of these two men differ and their actions are diametrically opposed.

> The writers here responsibly begin to set up a hypothetical situation to test their ideas. However, in their radical commitment to the black-and-white world of reason, as they conceive it, they allow only for the most extreme positions. The Confucians, whose ethical vision this Mohist text is attacking, pictured a world in which people differentiate their treatment of others in a carefully scaled manner depending on familial relationships and other factors, such as friendship, political roles, relative need, and broad social implications.

Now let us suppose that both of these men are determined to carry out their words in action so that word and deed match like the two halves of a tally and nothing that they say is not put into practice. Let us inquire further what would occur.

Suppose that we see here a broad and open plain, a vast wilderness. A man is here, buckling on his armor and donning his war helmet to set out for the field of battle, where the fortunes of life and death are unknown–or perhaps he is setting out on his lord's behalf on a mission to Ba or Yue, or to Qi or Chu, and his return from these distant places in uncertain.

Now let us ask, to whom would he likely entrust the support of his parents and the care of his wife and children? Would it be to the man of universality or to the man of partiality?

It seems to me that on occasions like these, there are no fools in the world! Though one may disapprove of universality himself, he would surely think it best to entrust his family to the man of universality. Thus people condemn universality in words, but adopt it in practice. Word and deed belie each other!

I cannot understand how people can hear this doctrine of universality explained and still criticize it! Yet men of the world do continue to criticize it. "Such a principle may be practical as a basis for choosing among ordinary men," they say, "but it cannot be used in selecting a ruler."

> The writers have now shown the practicality of universality to the degree that by means of this imaginative test, the reader who accepts all the Mohist premises must agree that those who follow universality will surely rise to positions of personal trust in society. Yet like all sects at this time, the Mohists attracted followers and patronage only to the degree that their doctrines seemed to be practical on a political level. The text now proceeds to raise its vision from the personal to the political.

IV. The Second Argument of Practicability: The Ruler

Let us consider both sides of the question. Suppose that we have two rulers, one who holds to universality and the other to partiality. The ruler who follows partiality says, "How could I possibly regard my many subjects as I regard myself? That would be completely at variance with human nature. Life flashes by like team of horses glimpsed through a crack in the wall!"

> This common proverb carries the sense of "carpe diem."

Because he views his subjects in this way, he will not feed them when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, nourish them when they are sick, or bury them when they die. Such are the words of the partial ruler and such are his actions.

But the words and actions of the ruler of universality are different. He says, "I have heard that the truly enlightened ruler thinks of his subjects first and of himself last. Only such a one can be considered a truly enlightened ruler." Because he views his subjects in this way, he will feed them when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, nourish them when they are sick, and bury them when they die. Such are the words of the ruler of universality and such are his actions.

> Can you think of a way in which an opponent of Mohism might use the same general framework of argument to show the *im*practicality of the Mohist rule of universality at the level of the ruler?

Thus the words of these two rulers disagree and their actions are diametrically opposed. Yet let us suppose that both of them speak in good faith and are determined to carry out their words in action, so that word and deed agree like the two halves of a tally and nothing they say is not put into action. Then let us venture to inquire further.

Suppose now that there is a year of plague and disease, where many suffer from hardship and hunger, and the corpses of countless victims lie tumbled in ditches by the roads. If in such times people could choose between these two types of rulers, which would they follow?

It seems to me that on occasions like this there are no fools in the world! Though one may disapprove of universality himself, he would surely think it best to follow the ruler who is guided by universality.

Thus people condemn universality in words but adopt it in practice, and word and deed belie one another. I cannot understand how people can hear this doctrine of universality and still criticize it! And yet people do continue to criticize it. "The doctrine of universality is benevolent and righteous," they say. "Yet how could it ever be put into practice? One could no more put it into practice than one could pick up Mt. Tai and leap over a river with it! Universality is merely an ideal to be longed for, not something of practical use."

> Having illustrated in the preceding arguments that universality will have the practical value of attracting the admiration and trust of individuals and of populations, the authors now address the issue of the impossibility of finding exemplary individuals who will sacrifice the pleasures of ordinary life in order to dedicate themselves to others so fully.

V. The Third Argument of Practicability: The Precedents of the Past

Mozi says, "As for picking up Mt. Tai and leaping over a river with it, no one from the beginning of humankind has ever been able to do that! But universal love and mutual aid were in fact put into practice by four sage kings of antiquity."

> The *Mozi* is not only the first Chinese text to develop well structured arguments based on reason, it is also the first text to develop standards for measuring the success of arguments. In a different chapter of the book, "Against Fatalism," the criteria for proving the validity of an argument are clearly established: *"An argument must be judged on the basis of three tests. What are the three tests? Its origin, its confirmability, and its practical applicability. How do we judge it on the basis of origins? We do so by comparing the theory with the deeds of the sage kings of antiquity. How do we judge its confirmability? We judge it on the basis of what ordinary people attest to on the basis of their eyes and ears. How do we judge its practical applicability? We judge it by observing whether it would benefit the state and the people when put into practice."* How well do the arguments concerning universality fulfill these criteria?

How do we know these sage kings practiced universality and mutual aid? Mozi says, "I did not live at the same time that they did, nor have I personally heard their voices or seen their faces. Yet I know because of what was written on the bamboo and silk that has been handed down through the ages, and because of what was engraved on metal and stone, and what was inscribed on bowls and basins.

In the "Great Oath" section of the *Book of History* says, "King Wen of Zhou was like the sun and the moon, shedding his bright light over the four quarters and the western lands." This means that the universal love of King Wen was so broad that it embraced the whole world, just as the universal light of the sun or moon shines upon the whole world without partiality. Such was the universality of King Wen. The universality of which Mozi speaks is patterned after that of King Wen.

And not only is this in the "Great Oath"; the "Oath of Yu" also expresses this idea in his charge to his troops. Yu said, "All you teeming people, listen to my words. I, in my insignificance, would not dare to act in a disorderly way. But the ruler of the Miao people, with his unyielding ways, has earned Heaven's punishment. For this reason I lead you, you lords of states, to conquer the ruler of the Miao." Now when Yu set out thus to conquer the ruler of the Miao, it was not that he sought to increase his wealth or eminence, to win fortune or blessing, or to delight his ears and eyes. It was only that he sought to promote what was beneficial to the world and to eliminate what was harmful. Such was the universality of Yu. The universality of which Mozi speaks is patterned after that of Yu.

> The "Oath of Yu," like the other two chapters of the *Book of History* mentioned in this chapter, was lost soon after the Classical period. We do not know what further context it provided, but certainly the use to which the authors put this fragment of text seems far-fetched when the text is viewed in isolation. The Emperor Yu was a great hero to the Mohists, rather like a patron saint. They celebrated legends that portrayed him, during the era when he calmed the primordial flood, as tirelessly laboring year after year for the greater good, wearing rustic clothes and eating simple food. The myth of the battle against the Miao people, however, is often associated with other sage kings of the distant past.

And not only is this in the "Oath of Yu"; the "Speech of Tang" also expresses this idea.

> Tang was the founder of the Shang Dynasty. He is associated with the legend of a great drought. This portrait of him offering himself as a sacrificial victim in order to end the drought also appears in the *Analects*.

"I, in my insignificance, dare to sacrifice a black beast and make this proclamation to the Heavenly Lord above: 'Now Heaven has sent down a great drought and it has fallen upon me. Yet I know not what crime I have committed against those above or those below. If

there is good, I never dare to conceal it; if there is evil, I never dare to pardon it. Judgment of my acts lies in the heart of the Lord on High. If the myriad lands have committed any crime, let it rest upon my person. But if it I who have committed some crime, let it not extend to the myriad lands."

This shows that although Tang was honored as the Son of Heaven and possessed all the riches of the world, he did not hesitate to offer himself as a sacrifice in his prayers and entreaties to the Lord on High and to the spirits. Such was the universality of Tang. The universality of which Mozi speaks is patterned after that of Tang.

This idea is expressed not only in the "Speech of Tang" but in the odes of Zhou found in the *Book of Poetry* as well. In the odes of Zhou it says,

> Broad, broad is the Dao the King,
> Impartial, unbiased.
> Even, even is the Dao of the King,
> Unbiased, impartial.
> Straight like an arrow,
> Smooth like a whetstone;
> The *junzi* walks along it,
> The ordinary man gazes upon it.

Thus what I have been speaking of is not a mere theory of action. In ancient times, when King Wen and King Wu administered the government and assigned each person his just share, they rewarded the worthy and punished the wicked without showing any favoritism towards their own relations. Such was the universality of Kings Wen and Wu. The universality of which Mozi speaks is patterned after that of Kings Wen and Wu.

I cannot understand how people can hear this doctrine of universality and still criticize it! And yet people do continue to criticize it. "If one takes no thought for what is beneficial or harmful to one's parents," they say, "how can one be called filial?"

> This is the most marked conflict between the Mohist position and that of traditional – and Confucian – values.

VI. Universality as a Form of Filiality

Mozi says, "Let us examine the way a filial son plans for the welfare of his parents. When he plans for his parents, does he wish others to love and benefit them, or does he wish others to hate and injure them? It stands to reason that he wishes others to love and benefit them."

Now, if I am a filial son, how do I accomplish this goal? Do I first make it a point to love and benefit other man's parents so that they will return love and benefit to mine? Or do I first make it a point to hate and injure other man's parents so that they will love and benefit mine? Obviously, I must first make it a point to love and benefit other man's parents

so that they will return love and benefit to mine. So if all of us are to be filial sons can we set about it any other way than by first making a point of loving and benefitting other men's parents? Must we assume that the filial sons of the world are too stupid to be capable of doing what it right?

Let us examine further. Among the books of the former kings, in the "Greater Odes" of the *Book of Poetry*, it says:

> There are no words that are not answered,
> No kindnesses that are not requited.
> If you throw a peach to me,
> I will return a plum to you.

The meaning is that one who loves will be loved by others and one who hates will be hated by others.

I cannot understand how people can hear this doctrine of universality and still criticize it! Do they believe it is too difficult to carry out? Why, in the past things far more difficult than this have been carried out.

VII. Tales of Difficult Changes Induced By the Attitudes of Rulers

King Ling of Chu loved slender waists. During his reign, the people of Chu ate no more than one meal a day, until they were too weak to stand without a cane or walk without a wall to lean against. Now reducing one's diet is a difficult thing to do, yet the people did it because it pleased King Ling. So within the space of a single generation the ways of the people can be changed, for they will strive to ingratiate themselves with those who rule over them.

King Goujian of Yue admired bravery and for three years trained his soldiers and subjects to be brave. But he was not sure whether they understood the true meaning of bravery and so he set fire to his warships and sounded the drums to advance. The soldiers trampled one another in their haste to go forward and countless numbers perished in the fire and water. Even when he ordered the drums to stop they did not retreat. The soldiers of Yue were truly astonishing. Now throwing oneself into flames is a difficult thing to do, yet the soldiers did it to please the King of Yue. So within the space of a single generation the ways of the people can be changed, for they will strive to ingratiate themselves with those who rule over them.

> The non-coercive leverage that rulers possessed over their subjects fascinated Classical thinkers. A number of such stories collected around the figure of Goujian. Perhaps the cleverest comes from the Legalist text, *Han Feizi*:

> *The King of Yue was contemplating an attack on the state of Wu and wished his people to regard death lightly. One day, traveling forth with his train of followers, he spied in the road a furious frog. The King bowed slightly towards it. "What is there to admire in a frog!" wondered the followers. "He has spirit!" cried the King. In the course of the following year, over a dozen men decapitated themselves so that their heads could be presented to the King as proof of their brave spirits.*

Duke Wen of Jin favored coarse robes. During the era of his reign, whether in the Duke's presence in the inner palace or walking in the outer courts, the gentlemen of Jin all wore jackets of coarse cloth, sheepskin fur coats, hats made of plainest silk and shoes of rough fiber. Now wearing coarse robes is a difficult thing to do, yet they did so because it pleased Duke Wen. So within the space of a single generation the ways of the people can be changed, for they will strive to ingratiate themselves with those who rule over them.

So we see that though reducing the diet, throwing oneself into the flames, or wearing rough fabrics are among the most difficult things to do in the world, yet because their rulers were please by these, in the space of a single generation the habits of the people could be changed. Why? In order to ingratiate themselves with those who ruled over them.

Now universal love and the benefitting of others are both profitable and easy beyond calculation. As I see it, the problem is merely that there is no ruler who delights in these things. If there were such a ruler, and if he encouraged people with rewards and praised and threatened them with punishments, then I believe that people would turn towards universal love and the benefit of others in the same manner that fire flames upwards and water flows down – nothing in the world could obstruct them from it.

Thus it is that universality is the Dao of the sage king, the comfort of lords and grandees, and the means of providing sufficient food and clothing to the people of the world. A *junzi* cannot do better than to examine closely this doctrine of universality and then implement it with all his effort. One who is a ruler will surely become generous; one who is a minister will surely become loyal; one who is a father will surely become kind; one who is a son will surely become filial; one who is an elder brother will surely act as a friend; one who is a younger brother will surely act with respect. Thus a *junzi* who wishes to be a generous ruler, loyal minister, kind father, filial son, comradely older brother, or respectful younger brother must see the necessity of putting universality into practice. It is the Dao of the sage kings and the great benefit of the people.