

MIDTERM PAPER

GAGE FARMER

SINCE the beginning of time, a man named Confucius had all the answers to everything.

And yes of course, he was right about everything he taught. In these teachings, Mr. Confucius outlines the ideal way to carry oneself (assuming the self is even **REAL!!!**), as well as what a virtuous and prosperous society should look like. While Confucius was a prominent philosopher in his time, not everyone agreed with what he had to say, enter the Mohists. These guys were not a fan of virtues and thought that actions were more important as virtues were abstract and irrelevant. This of course can be refuted by the Confucian perspective, though you'll have to reach the end of the paper to find out more about that.

For us Confucians, the most important character traits are those which align with the moral and social harmony of society. Benevolence is the core virtue, meaning the ability to care for others and act in a way which promotes harmony and kindness. This is the foundation for all other virtues in that it gives reason to why many of the other virtues are practiced, being that the desired outcome is harmony and kindness. Ritual is the next most important virtue, which represents the ability to conform to social norms and govern one's own behavior in a way which will ensure respect for others and maintaining order. Filial piety is another virtue, and this one is about respect for one's parents and ancestors. The idea behind filial piety is that you must obey and serve your elders, because the assumption is that they care equally for you and have your best interests in mind, while including wisdom they have that you may not be able to understand yet. Following this is righteousness, and this is the mindset of always seeking to do what is right, even if it is difficult or goes against your own personal interests. Regardless of personal gain, to be righteous one must always do the right thing and help others. The final main virtue would be wisdom, which is not easily gained and practiced. Wisdom in this case is taught as the ability to make good judgements based on moral principles. A lack of wisdom does not consider a person

to be non-virtuous, so long as that person strives to learn from mistakes. This is not because it is an unimportant virtue, rather because wisdom cannot simply be turned on and off like a light switch, rather it is gained through life and the experiences that come with it. Wisdom when earned and practiced properly can be one of the most important virtues, as it is the basis of reasoning for filial piety and comes with a slew of other benefits such as the ability to understand the deeper meanings of life, society, and relationships.

Confucius also taught about how society as a whole should be structured, and what a person's role in society should be in regard to whom they have the weightiest moral duties. In each of the five hierarchical relationships he teaches, there is a common theme of there being a leader and a follower or followers. This hierarchical framework is not about oppression, rather about maintaining balance and harmony. Confucius believes that a society which is based on clearly defined roles is essential to both personal growth and societal harmony, as it helps individuals develop virtues such as respect, responsibility, and empathy among others. Within this hierarchy there is an implied direction in which one's moral duties should face, which Confucius also goes on to teach about. The man himself says in short that a virtuous person owes their primary duties to their family, which aligns well with filial piety. The reasoning behind this is that the family is the foundation of moral development, and due to this they are to be honored and served as such. Secondly Confucius teaches that one has a duty to their society, and he goes on to say that this virtuous duty will help cultivate a virtuous society and positively impact everyone within it. This duty has ties to the third and final duty taught, which is the duty one has to the ruler. The implication behind this duty is that the ruler themselves is also a virtuous being and strives to lead by example of virtuousness. One's duty of acting with virtue to their ruler will

positively impact both the ruler into acting with more benevolence and thus will positively impact the society in which they live and rule.

The Mohists did not agree with Confucius on several key points, namely two of the main virtues: benevolence and ritual. Mohists believed that the keys to achieving moral and social order were not in cultivating virtuous people, rather in objective and measurable acts which benefit society. They believed that intentions and character were irrelevant and impractical in guiding action, and that morality should be based on actions instead. In their eyes, the intent of an action didn't matter so long as the action led to a greater overall benefit. This was not the only point of disagreement, as the Mohists also rejected Confucius' teachings of hierarchical relationships, particularly disagreeing with the fact that moral duties are stronger towards family and friends than to strangers. They argued that this favoritism could lead towards injustice and even war in some case. Instead, they taught of impartial care, being that all people are deserving of equal moral care, regardless of their relationship to a person. The idea behind this is that social conflicts would cease to exist, and resources would be spread more evenly among people. This has proven in practice not to be the case; however, the idea is still noble. The final major criticism of Mohists towards Confucianism was of their view of government, which as previously stated had emphasized virtuous leadership and the honor of morally just people. Mohists did not agree with this, and in contrast believed that the government should set out clear, enforceable standards to follow rather than the potentially vague moral character of the ruler.

While Mohists disagreed with many fundamental values of what Confucius taught, including things like rituals and music, they were not always correct. As a Confucian the idea that the intent of an action is irrelevant to the result is ridiculous, where there are many actions that may not outwardly benefit society that could be considered virtuous with good intentions.

One such example would be to encourage someone to leave an abusive or violent relationship. This would not in any way measurably benefit society, however it is benevolent to offer a solution to someone's troubles where they may otherwise feel stuck. This can be life changing to many but in very few cases does this have any sort of effect on society, so Mohists would disregard it as virtuous. Another area where Mohists are wrong is the idea that everyone is equally deserving of your moral duty. To compare the impact of someone such as your parents who have raised and supported you throughout your life to a stranger who you have no knowledge of and who has no impact on your life is asinine. While each person is deserving of virtuous acts, there is no contest as to who is more deserving. If one's mother and a complete stranger were on separate tracks in the trolley scenario, no sane person would pull the lever to redirect the trolley if it resulted in the death of their mother. This does not mean the stranger is worse than the mother, or less deserving of fortune than the mother, but the Mohist perspective assumes such about Confucian teachings. From the Mohist perspective it would not matter if you pulled the lever or not, which is why partiality is real and matters.

Despite many of these lame arguments from the Mohists, they are onto something with the idea that a government should set in place clear and enforceable rules. This is not to replace the Confucian idea that a leader is to rule virtuously and by example, as the two ideas of how to lead a society can be used together for the best possible outcome. Overall, the Mohists and the Confucians have many disagreements, but are not totally without their similarities. The Mohists seem to be more focused towards what may appear most fair to the most people, though Confucians are more focused towards the idea that a virtuous society comes from a collection of virtuous individuals, each with their own unique perspective on what it means to be virtuous, and who they are most morally obligated to act this way towards.

Works Cited

Ivanhoe, Philip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.
Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2023.