Lecture 5: Mohism

Mozi – *Mozi* (Chapter 16: Impartial Caring)
Agenda

1. Mozi
2. Jian’ai (Impartial Caring or Inclusive Care)
3. Partiality versus Impartiality
4. Jian’ai as Inclusive Care
Comparative Philosophy

• Comparative or cross-cultural philosophy—engaging with philosophical traditions in multiple cultures or contexts—helps to avoid parochialism.

• It enables us to explore new ways of thinking that otherwise might be foreclosed by the very assumptions or conceptual framework that we take for granted.
Mozi

• Mozi (480-390 BCE) was born a member of the craft or artisan class.
• Some argue he is the first true philosopher of China because he made explicit and systematic arguments.
• Mozi is also the name of the philosophical text compiled by Mohists (followers of Mozi) from Mozi’s thought.
• Lived at the same time as Socrates (470-399 BCE).
Mozi

• Mozi lived during the Warring States Period (right after the Spring and Autumn period) before the unification of China by the Qin emperor.

• He led an organized utopian movement in which members engaged in direct social action, including specializing in the military defenses of states.
Mozi

Guiding Questions: Some think that Mozi was a consequentialist (he certainly thought there were three basic goods that state should maximize: wealth, order, and their population).

• Is this true?

• In what sense might Mozi be a consequentialist and in what sense might he not be?

• How are Mozi’s views similar to or different from those of John Stuart Mill and utilitarians?
Jian’ai 兼愛

• Jian’ai 兼愛 used to be sometimes translated as “universal love” although this is misleading. Our text (translated by Philip Ivanhoe) renders it “impartial caring.” Another possible translation is “inclusive care.”

• As we work through the Mozi, let’s think about which one of these translations might be the best. This is an example of exegetical work!
Partiality versus Impartiality

• “The business of a benevolent person is to promote what is beneficial to the world and eliminate what is harmful” (63).
• “Replace partiality with impartiality” (64).
• “Impartiality as the correct standard” (65).
• These statements all sound consequential in nature.
Partiality versus Impartiality

Question: What does it mean to be partial and what does it mean to be impartial?

• Impartiality might be understood as treating everyone the same—counting everyone’s interests as mattering equally.

• Partiality might be understood as treating some people and their interests as mattering more to you than others—for instance, because they stand in special relationships to you such as parents or friends.
Partiality versus Impartiality

• What are the harms that are being done in the world?
• Mozi lists the following:
  • Great states attacking small states
  • Great families wreaking havoc on small families
  • Strong robbing the weak
• He also lists these as harms:
  • Rulers who are not kind
  • Ministers who are not loyal
  • Fathers who are not loving
  • Children who are not filial
• How are these two sorts of harms different from one another?
  • The first sort of harm is where the strong hurt the weak. The second sort of harm seems to be cases in which people fail to fulfill obligations they owe to others who stand in particular relationships to them. But this second sort of harm seems to be a case where people are not *partial* in the right way!
Partiality versus Impartiality

“Suppose one must put on one’s armor and helmet and go to war in a vast and open wilderness where life and death are uncertain; or suppose one was sent by one’s ruler or high minister to the distant states of Ba, Yue, Qi, or Jing and could not be sure of either reaching them or ever returning from one’s mission. Under such conditions of uncertainty, to whom would one entrust the well-being of one’s parents, wife, and children? 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?” (66)
Partiality versus Impartiality

• The previous thought experiment asks whether you would prefer an impartial person or a partial person to take care of your family and concludes you would prefer an impartial person. However, the very motivation behind choosing an impartial person seems to be *partial*! That is, you are choosing the impartial person because you care *partially* about your family.

• Is this a contradiction in Mozi’s thought?
Jian’ai as Inclusive Care

• Interpreting jian’ai as inclusive care rather than impartial care is consistent with thinking that Mozi did not repudiate the obligation we owe to people with whom we stand in special relationships (e.g. family, friends, rulers/subjects).

• Instead, Mozi wants us to expand our circle of care to include people with whom we might not have special relationships. At the very least, this acts as a counter to temptations to exploit others in order to help one’s in-group when one is strong and in a position to do so.
Jian’ai as Inclusive Care

• How does jian’ai understood as inclusive care differ from the views of John Stuart Mill and other utilitarians?

• Which view is better?

• One the one hand, jian’ai as inclusive care avoids the objection to utilitarianism that it sacrifices personal relationships.

• On the other hand, does jian’ai as inclusive care give up on an advantageous feature of utilitarianism—namely, having an objective standard by which to weigh different interests?