

# Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science

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Heaven and the spirits their customary respects without much caring whether Heaven is a personal being or the spirits of the dead actually exist. More and more, during the period of the philosophers, they come to regard Heaven merely as an impersonal power responsible for everything outside human control, including the good and ill fortune which is to be accepted as our destiny. The Mohist however comes from a less sophisticated class in which the perennial folk religion of China is still alive, and does not like his masters to forget that they too are subjects of still higher beings. "The Confucians think that Heaven is insensible and the spirits are not divine (以天爲不明, 以鬼爲不神). Heaven and the spirits are displeased; this is enough to bring ruin on the Empire."<sup>35</sup> The Confucian Kung-meng 公孟 "says that the spirits do not exist, and also that the gentleman must learn to perform sacrifices", which is like "learning the etiquette for guests without having any guests, making a fishnet although there are no fish".<sup>36</sup> The expositions of the doctrines of "The will of Heaven", "Elucidating the spirits" and 'Condemning fatalism' insist fiercely that men will act morally only if they cease to regard changes of fortune as their destiny, and come to recognise that Heaven and the spirits reward the good and punish the wicked.

It is plain that more is involved here than a simple fidelity to popular pieties. Because the Mohist advocates a new universal morality he requires another sanction than the respect of his peers, for his peers are still satisfied with custom and its divisive loyalties; he is driven in the same direction as the great Middle Eastern religions, with their universal moralities ordained by a personal God who will judge the mighty as they deserve. However there is nothing to suggest any spiritual dimension deeper than a guilty fear of ghosts. Even early Mohism is not on closer inspection a religious movement; it is as man-centred as Confucianism, and insists on the power and benevolence of the spirits only as a buttress for human morality. The awe and resignation with which Confucius accepts what Heaven decrees for him has much more of the sense of the holy in it than anything in *Mo-tzu*.

At first sight one might suppose that on this issue it is the Confucians who are the rationalists. But the this-worldliness of Confucians has nothing to do with ratiocination. Confucius offers himself to his disciples simply as a maturer man with finer perceptions in a shared scheme of values. His school does not enter into rational debate until it begins to be challenged by other schools, first of all by the Mohists. The early Mohists are ignorant

<sup>35</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 48 (Sun 287/5).

<sup>36</sup> *Uti sup.* ch. 48 (Sun 286/3).

men, excluded from the best culture of their time, but compelled to give reasons for their tenets, because they are new. Each of the 10 triads of chapters defending their 10 doctrines is a laboriously assembled collection of arguments to convince doubters. Some of the argumentation is very crude, as in the surviving chapter on 'Elucidating the spirits', which refutes sceptics who deny the existence of spirits by applying the three tests, ancient authority, common observation, and practical consequences: (1) In every village there are people who have seen and heard spirits. (Some lively ghost stories are quoted from the annals of the states.) (2) If you doubt the witness of humble people, you cannot deny the witness of the ancient sage kings, who are proved to have believed in spirits by quotations from the *Songs* and *Documents*. (3) People behave better if they know the spirits are watching them.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, this is the start of rational discourse in China. Within a century or so the Mohists will have developed into the most sophisticated of all the ancient Chinese thinkers.

### 1/1/1/2 The metaphysical crisis in the 4th century

About 350 B.C. a new competitor enters the scene, the individualist Yang Chu 楊朱. We know little about the teaching of Yang Chu himself except on the authority of his enemies, who call it egoism (*wei wu* 爲我)<sup>38</sup> and say that it was his principle not to sacrifice as much as a hair to benefit the whole Empire.<sup>39</sup> But we do have later individualist writings, certain chapters of the encyclopedia *Lü-shih ch'ün-ch'iu* (c. 240 B.C.),<sup>40</sup> and from these we can get some idea of how his philosophy looked from the inside.

Confucians and Mohists had never been much interested in private life. For Confucians life is fulfilled in public service, and the only salve for the misfortune of being out of office is a serene acceptance of the decree of Heaven. But in the 4th century many people were no longer finding it obvious that it is really so much better to battle for power and possessions than to stay at home and do as one pleases. By 300 B.C. the Taoist Chuang-tzu will have provided a mystical philosophy for all who temporarily or permanently retire from the world, but the earlier individualists are not in the least mystical. Their first consideration is simply the danger to life and limb of plunging into the murderous political struggles of the time.

<sup>37</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Mencius* 7A/26. For a Mohist example of the phrase, cf. EC 1 below.

<sup>39</sup> *Mencius* 7A/26. *Lieh-tzu* ch. 7 (Yang 146/2-5).

<sup>40</sup> *Pen sheng* 本生, *Chung chi* 重己, *Kuei sheng* 貴生, *Ch'ing yü* 情欲, *Shen wei* 審爲.

(‘The will of Heaven’, ‘Elucidating the spirits’), philosophy (‘Rejecting destiny’, ‘Universal love’), politics (‘Elevating worth’, ‘Conformity with superiors’, ‘Rejecting aggression’), and miscellaneous questions of morals (‘Economy in funerals’, ‘Economy in expenditure’, ‘Rejecting music’). One is tempted to think of the community as a church rather than a philosophical school, for it preached a stringent morality based on the principle of universal love, condemned luxury and unprofitable amusements such as music, insisted that Heaven and the spirits reward the good and punish the wicked, denounced the Confucians for their scepticism and fatalism. Yet the Mohists are also vigorous independent thinkers who submit all traditional morality to the test of social utility, explicitly defend innovation, and support the new kind of centralised state, with merit rather than birth as the grounds for preferment, which to the regret of Confucians was emerging from the ruins of the feudal order. As challengers of traditional values they are the first Chinese thinkers to defend their principles by rational debate; and by 300 B.C., the period of the documents on ethics, logic and the sciences which we shall examine, the religious aspect of Mohism has almost disappeared in the most highly rationalised system that ancient China ever achieved.

The Mohists, who puzzle us by being at once the most religious and the most logical of the ancient thinkers, also contrive to be both the most pacifistic and the most martial. One of their 10 doctrines was the condemnation of all military aggression, a corollary of their principle of universal love. But they did not merely allow defensive war, they specialised in it; they were a military as much as a religious and philosophical community. The last 20 chapters of the Mohist corpus are devoted to war and the engineering of defence works.<sup>4</sup> We read in the *Lü-shih ch’ün-ch’iu* 呂氏春秋, a syncretistic philosophical encyclopedia (c. 240 B.C.), that Meng Sheng 孟勝, supreme head of the community, contracted with the Lord of Yang-ch’eng 陽城 in the state of Ch’u 楚 to undertake the defence of his city.<sup>5</sup> In 381 B.C. the Lord of Yang-ch’eng was condemned to death, and Meng Sheng was faced with the choice between breaking his contract and sacrificing all the Mohists of Ch’u in a hopeless fight. When reproached for being ready to ‘let Mohism die out from the world’ he replied: ‘I am not only the Lord of Yang-ch’eng’s teacher but his friend, not only his friend

but his vassal. If I do not die for him, certainly no one will ever again look for a reverend teacher, worthy friend or loyal vassal among the Mohists. It is by dying for him that I shall do the duty of a Mohist and pass on our tradition”. After sending two emissaries to convey the succession to a Mohist in the state of Sung he fought to the death with his 83 disciples. The two emissaries, against the orders of the new chief, returned from Sung to die with them.

If such apparent incongruities surprise us, it is partly because of the extraordinary impersonality of Mohist writing both early and late, which allows us no opportunity to experience the Mohist view of the world from inside. Even the collections of Mo-tzu’s conversations consist entirely of reasoned judgments on specific issues placed in meagre narrative settings, and tell us more about the doctrinal problems, social status and internal organisation of the school than about Mo-tzu himself. We have none of the lively impression of the man and of his relations with his disciples which we derive from the *Analects* in the case of Confucius. The Mohists seem uninterested either in remembering what their founder was like or in crystallising a legend about him. A few anecdotes in other sources, such as the story of Meng Sheng’s suicidal loyalty, and another of a chief of the Mohists in Ch’u who insisted on the execution of his only son for murder in spite of the King’s willingness to pardon him,<sup>6</sup> give us a much more vivid idea of what it was like to be a Mohist than almost anything in their own book.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Lü-shih ch’ün-ch’iu* ch. 1/5 (Hsu 95/1–96/6).

<sup>5</sup> Watanabe Takashi makes a very interesting attempt to explain such incongruities by the hypothesis that the 10 doctrines emerged at successive stages in the history of the school. He conceives the Mohists as a radical movement of urban craftsmen at first dedicated to ‘Universal love’ and ‘Rejecting aggression’, later corrupted by the patronage of King Hui-wen 惠文 of Ch’u (337–311 B.C.) and converted to ‘Conformity with superiors’ and reverence for Heaven and the spirits. (Watanabe (1961, 1962)) The trouble with this argument (in which Watanabe makes many important observations) is that it relegates several of the core chapters of *Mo-tzu* in all three versions to the final phase of Mohism in the 3rd century B.C. But in relation to the dialectical chapters, and even to the collections of Mo-tzu’s supposed sayings (ch. 46–49), all 10 triads of chapters share a crudity of thought and style which surely belongs to an earlier and less sophisticated period. (One of the interesting things in pre-Han, as in early Greek philosophy, is that we can watch over several centuries a people learning how to think.) I consider the inconsistencies only apparent and find it impossible to date any of the 10 triads (at any rate in its ancestral form) later than 350 B.C. Since they are transparently records of oral tradition (with crucial passages introduced by ‘The Master Mo-tzu said . . .’) we cannot be sure that the substance of all of them goes back to Mo-tzu himself and there may be signs of late revision: but the school must have committed itself to the 10 doctrines very early in its history.

<sup>4</sup> The argument of Chu Hsi-tsu 朱希祖 (op. cit.) that the military chapters are a Han forgery seems to be no longer tenable. It is criticised by Sun Tz’ü-chou 孫次舟 (KSP 6), who however still rejects the last two chapters, and by Watanabe Takashi 渡邊卓 (1957).

<sup>5</sup> *Lü-shih ch’ün-ch’iu* ch. 19/3 (Hsu 894/5–896/8).

But there is a more interesting reason for the peculiar impression made by the Mohists. Most early Chinese thinkers seem as far as we can tell to stand rather high up in the social hierarchy; but there is strong evidence that the Mohist movement was rooted in the trades and crafts of the towns, among people otherwise inarticulate in ancient China.<sup>8</sup> The Mohists called themselves *mo che* 墨者 or *mo* as the Confucians called themselves *ju* 儒, another name of obscure origin; unless it was a surname (and no other pre-Han school is called after its founder's surname) it would seem that 'the *mo* Ti' was a man of the lower orders known only by his personal name.<sup>9</sup> On one occasion he is said to have been refused an interview with King Hui 惠 of Ch'u (488-432 B.C.) on the grounds that His Majesty would not listen to a man of base origins (賤人).<sup>10</sup> In the only episode in *Mo-tzu* in which he figures as anything but a preacher or debater!<sup>11</sup> Mo-tzu hears that the engineer Kung-shu Pan 公輸盤 has invented a scaling ladder with which the army of Ch'u will conquer the capital of Sung, hurries to Ch'u, demonstrates to Kung-shu Pan that he can counter all his nine possibilities of attack, and when threatened with death tells him that it will be useless to kill him since 300 of his followers are already operating his engines of defence on the walls of Sung. Passing through Sung on his return journey from Ch'u he is refused shelter from the rain by the warden of one of the

<sup>8</sup> Fang Shou-ch'u in 1937 was the first to assemble the evidence that Mo-tzu was a craftsman, probably a wheelwright (op. cit. 15-17). That the Mohist movement was based on the crafts is now widely accepted, in China and also in Japan (Watanabe (1961) 1221-1223, Takata 高田淳 (1967) 26-30), although there is some disagreement as to whether Mo-tzu was himself a craftsman or a knight (*shih* 士) like Confucius, in some way connected with the crafts. For Communist scholars this issue is tied up with the doctrinal question of whether Mo-tzu's historical role was progressive or reactionary. Chang Tai-nien 張岱年 (op. cit.), for whom Mo-tzu is reactionary, treats him as a knight of possible artisan origin. Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭 (1964) 141-142 holds that he was a craftsman who rose to the rank of knight, and that 'Mo-tzu and the school he founded reflect the demands and interests of the small-owner producers of the time, especially in the handicrafts'. But the data are perhaps better regarded as evidence for the social composition of the community than of stages in its founder's career.

For the place of the artisan in Chinese civilization, cf. Needham vol. 4/2, 10-50.

<sup>9</sup> That Mo is not a surname was first argued in detail by Chiang Ch'uan 江瑛 in 1917 (op. cit. 129-151). He took *mo* in the sense of 'dark', as referring to the sun-blacked faces of the work-hardened Mohists (cf. *Mo-tzu* ch. 56, Sun 335/-1, and a description of Mo-tzu himself as black in ch. 47, Sun 280/7). Since *mo* 'branding' is the lightest of the Five Punishments, Ch'ien Mu suggested that it distinguished the Mohists as men who worked like convicts (Ch'ien (1931) 1-7). Watanabe (1967) 68-72 takes *mo* in its ordinary sense of 'ink', referring to the inked cord of the carpenter. The traditional view that Mo is a surname however still has defenders (cf. Fang Shou-ch'u, B 1-15).

<sup>10</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 47 (Sun 276/6).

<sup>11</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 50.

city gates. The chapters about military engineering in *Mo-tzu*, whether or not actually written by artisans, obviously reflect their specialised knowledge. We may notice also that when Kung-shu Pan makes a wooden kite which flies for three days, Mo-tzu tells him, objecting to its uselessness: "The kite you made is not worth the inchpin of a wheel made by me; with a piece of wood three inches long, which it takes only a moment to cut out, one supports a load of 50 *shih*!"<sup>12</sup> This saying, which does not seem to be intended metaphorically, surely reflects a tradition that Mo-tzu was a wheelwright. Later legend, which remembers Mo-tzu and Kung-shu Pan as the two master-craftsmen of their age, credits Mo-tzu himself with the making of the kite.<sup>13</sup>

The evidence of low social status is sometimes more marked in non-Mohist sources. In one version of the story of the defence of Sung, Mo-tzu introduces himself to the King of Ch'u as "a commoner from the North" (北方之鄙人).<sup>14</sup> When offered a fief by the King of Yueh 越 Mo-tzu says that even if he expected the King to carry out his policies he would be content to "be ranked with the clients and the populace (賓萌), I would not presume to seek office" (The *Mo-tzu* parallel has "... rank myself among his ministers (諸臣); why should I want a fief?").<sup>15</sup> Mencius when approached by a Mohist will debate with him only through an intermediary.<sup>16</sup> Hsün-tzu 荀子 derides the idea that a king should himself do the work he delegates as "the Way of a menial, the opinion of Mo-tzu" (役夫之道也, 墨子之說也).<sup>17</sup>

Throughout *Mo-tzu* one notices that *chün-tzu* 君子 'gentleman' and *hsiao jen* 小人 'small man' are not, as they are for Confucians, moral as well as social terms. A Mohist, like a Confucian, aspires to be benevolent, righteous, a sage... but not a gentleman. The notoriously graceless style of early Mohist writing, humourless, ponderous, repetitious, is also significant in this connexion. Other pre-Han thinkers, even when they are not

<sup>12</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 49 (Sun 302/-4). Sun's emendation of Ti 翟 to *ching* 匠 'craftsman' has no authority except that it is the reading in the passage as quoted in a 10th century encyclopedia, the editor of which no doubt shared Sun's implicit assumption that Mo-tzu could not have worked with his own hands. The version in *Han Fei tzu* ch. 32 (Ch'en 625/1-3), in which Mo-tzu makes the kite himself but it breaks on the first day (for further versions, cf. Sun 468), ends with the comment: "Mo-tzu had the truest kind of skill; he was skilful in making linchpins, clumsy in making kites" (He was skilful at useful but not at useless things).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the examples collected in Sun 468.

<sup>14</sup> *Lü-shih ch'ün-ch'ü* ch. 21/5 (Hsu 1018/7).

<sup>15</sup> *Lü-shih ch'ün-ch'ü* ch. 19/2 (Hsu 883/5). Cf. *Mo-tzu* ch. 49 (Sun 298/-1).

<sup>16</sup> *Mencius* 3A/5.

<sup>17</sup> *Hsün-tzu* ch. 11 (Liang 147/1).

with the support of the Threefold Artisans and of Ch'uan Mi".<sup>22</sup> The detailed record of the *Tso-chuan* unfortunately breaks off at 463 B.C., but it is enough to suggest that in the 5th century B.C., at the time of the rise of Mohism, there might be craftsmen who would be forming ideas of their own about what kind of prince deserved their support, for the benefit of themselves and of the people at large.

There is no evidence of any popular movement seeking power for its own leaders. Certainly the Mohists themselves are not a revolutionary league, at any rate in the 4th and 3rd centuries; if there were anything seditious about them their enemies would be sure to say so. Like the Confucians, they seek audiences with princes and hope to be appointed to high office. It would seem however that they expect a Mohist in office to contribute to the funds of the organisation, which can request his resignation if he betrays its principles.<sup>23</sup> We may see them as social outsiders who have formed the conception of a state which will not benefit only the privileged, who with the dissolution of hereditary barriers can earn promotion by their technical skills, and who appreciate the problem that those who do get promotion may forget where they came from.

The remoteness of the Mohist movement from the central Chinese tradition, its seeming incongruities and its abrupt disappearance from history, become intelligible if we think of it as a confluence of merchants, craftsmen and déclassé nobles, briefly emerging as a power in the cities as the feudal order disintegrates, but soon to be thrust back by the new bureaucratised Empire into the station which it has pleased Heaven to decree for them. Confucius, a teacher of young nobles in Lu 魯, the state most faithful to the Chou tradition, has devoted his life to defining and refining the failing values embodied in the manners and culture of the Chou aristocracy, behind which he perceives an ideal of the true gentleman guided by such implicit principles as that the benevolent "love others" and "Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you".<sup>24</sup> But to the man from the lower orders nothing said by Confucians can be relevant except the occasional ethical generalisation which prepares the way for the Mohist principle of universal love. He has never shared in the culture of Chou, cannot afford to complicate his life with elaborate etiquette, has no leisure to fulfil such ritual obligations as the duty to mourn his father for three years. He is a needy, or if no longer needy a thrifty man, whose touchstone of value must always be practical utility. From his worn's eye

<sup>22</sup> *Tso-chuan* Duke Ai 17, 25 (Legge 849/8, 856/6, 7).

<sup>23</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 46, 49 (Sun 267/-1—268/7, 301/4—8).

<sup>24</sup> *Analects* 12/22, 15/24.

view the cultural refinements of nobles are less obvious than their extravagance, which wastes the resources on which he and his like depend. Music, for Confucius the most civilizing of the arts, suggests to his mind only the expensiveness of the great court orchestras, an especially insolent exhibition of conspicuous consumption since they are audible in the distance to those not privileged to see them; he is in the position of the peasants in *Mencius* who, "when they hear the sound of the King's bells and drums, the notes of his pipes and flutes, all with aching heads and knitted brows tell each other 'What else but our king's love of music has brought us to this pass?'"<sup>25</sup> These thrifty, utilitarian attitudes are reflected in the doctrines of 'Economy in expenditure', 'Economy in funerals' and 'Condemnation of music', given the same status among the 10 doctrines as others which outside such a social context would seem to be on a quite different level of importance.

The Mohist's only tradition is his craft, and in this period of swift social and technological change, innovation is part of the tradition of the crafts. The artisan attracts attention by having something new to offer—the most urgent attention if (like the Mohists and Kung-shu Pan) he invents new engines of war. To the Confucian precept "The gentleman follows and does not originate" the Mohist answers: "In ancient times Yi originated the bow, Chu armour, Hsi Chung the carriage, Ch'iao Ch'ui the boat. Does it follow that the armourers and wheelwrights of today are all gentlemen, and the four inventors were all vulgar men? Moreover anything that you follow must have been originated by someone, so that on your own showing you follow in everything the way of vulgar men".<sup>26</sup> This innovative attitude does not discourage early Mohists from citing ancient authority. The three chapters on fatalism all begin by laying down three tests of sound doctrine, for which we quote the first version:<sup>27</sup> "On what is it based? Look upwards to base it on the deeds of the ancient sage kings. By what is it measured? Look downwards to measure it by scrutinising what the eyes and ears of ordinary people confirm to be real. On what is it put to use? Apply it in administration, and observe whether it benefits the mass of the people in the civilized states". This is notable as the first Chinese attempt to formulate principles of argumentation, but it still gives the first place to ancient authority. The early writings are full of quotations from the ancients, used however in a way quite different from a Confucian's. Confucius treasures and explores the significance of all that survives of the songs, rituals and music of Chou. He is less interested in more ancient authorities whose

<sup>25</sup> *Mencius* 1B/1.

<sup>26</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 39 (Sun 186/-4—187/6).

<sup>27</sup> *Uti sup.* ch. 35 (Sun 170/5—7).

traditions have broken off, and even says explicitly that he prefers the Chou to earlier dynasties.<sup>28</sup> The Mohist on the other hand judges doctrines primarily by his third test, their practical consequences, and combs ancient documents (most of them professedly earlier than Chou) for supporting quotations however dubious, like a Protestant sectary using and misusing Scripture.

The Mohist's deepest objection to the aristocratic moral code is that it is divisive, that it requires the gentleman to put his duties to his family and his lord before the interests of anyone else. The result is that each family and state is entitled, and indeed obliged, to prefer itself to others and be drawn into war with others, a war in which whoever wins or loses the common people are always the sufferers. The Mohist sees that a morality which will not sacrifice him to his social superiors has to be one unified by a single principle applying to all. It is the principle of 'loving others as you love yourself . . . having as much regard for father and elder brother and for lord as for yourself . . . having as much regard for younger brother and son and for vassal as for yourself . . . having as much regard for others' families as for your own . . . having as much regard for others' states as for your own'.<sup>29</sup> He calls it *chien ai* 兼愛, which we can hardly avoid translating as 'loving everyone' or 'universal love', although this may give the false impression that he is interested in the warmth of the sentiment rather than the equality of the concern. He uses *ai* as we use 'love' when talking of 'self-love', which is concern for oneself; *chien ai* is being as much concerned for one person as for another. Although the impersonality of their writing makes it hard to imagine ourselves into their attitudes, one has the impression that Mohists were not people with warm sympathies towards everyone, but people whose personal affections are disciplined by a stern sense of justice. (Witness that Mohist in Ch'in who had his son executed.)<sup>30</sup> A corollary of *chien ai* is 'Condemning aggression'; by 'aggression' (*tung* 攻) is understood one state attacking another simply in order to benefit at its expense, which is seen as a crime no different from the private robberies and murders which a ruler punishes inside his state. The Mohist has nothing against war as such, and even repudiates the aristocratic code of chivalry which Confucians were trying to keep alive. If your cause is righteous, why give the enemy a second chance?<sup>31</sup> In any

<sup>28</sup> *Analects* 3/14.

<sup>29</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 14 (Sun 66/4-10).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. p. 5 above.

<sup>31</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 39 (Sun 187/6-188/3).

case it is an irony of his situation that what political leverage he has derives from his reputation as a military engineer.

To understand the Mohist's viewpoint in politics, we may imagine the traders and artisans as like their counterparts in 15th century Spain, France and England, welcoming absolute monarchy because centralisation and bureaucratisation defend them against local magnates and give them new opportunities of rising in the world. By the principle of 'Promotion of worth', the sage king 'appoints anyone who has ability, even if he is from the peasants or from the craftsmen or traders', so that "no one in office is unchangeably a noble, no one of the people is irrevocably among the base".<sup>32</sup> The Mohist believes that government originated in the need to unify the 'different moralities' (異義) of individuals competing in the primitive war of all against all, and that its function is to "unify and assimilate morality throughout the Empire" (一今天下之義).<sup>33</sup> It is interesting that he treats anarchy as a conflict not of interests but of 'moralities', by which he means not moral codes but the conflicting family or state loyalties within the traditional code. The Mohist community can only preach the unifying ethic of universal love, but an Empire governed on Mohist lines will effectively submerge local loyalties in wider and wider loyalties. At each level, village, district, state, Empire, the administrator will unify the standards of all below him by imposing the standards at the level immediately above him. At the top of the pyramid the Emperor will impose the standards of the only power above him, which is Heaven. This is the doctrine of "Conforming to the level above, not leaguing together below" (上同而不下比). It is to be noticed that at each level the administrator demands conformity to his superior, not to himself, and one Chou doctrine which the Mohists do not question is that if the Emperor disobeys Heaven his subjects' ultimate allegiance must be to Heaven,<sup>34</sup> so that they agree with Confucians in admitting the right to revolution. The authoritarian doctrine of 'Conforming to superiors' is not incompatible with 'Universal love' (that is, equal concern for all), on the contrary it is its political realisation.

Aristocratic codes such as Confucianism are sanctioned by shame rather than guilt. The conduct the noble owes to his self-respect does not have to be backed by promises or threats from above, may even conflict with them. (Catholic nobilities in Europe observed their codes of duelling and courtly love at the risk of their souls.) Confucians are content to pay

<sup>32</sup> *Mo-tzu* ch. 8 (Sun 28/-1, 29/5).

<sup>33</sup> *U<sup>1</sup> sup.* ch. 11-13 (Sun 47/1, 49/2 and *passim*).

<sup>34</sup> *U<sup>1</sup> sup.* ch. 11 (Sun 49/2-9).

actually describe and operate the apparatus of disputation, the later Mohists.

A kind of disputation with "five wins and three arrivals" (五勝三至), which unfortunately are nowhere specified in the surviving sources, seems to have had wide currency among the schools. Various forms of its programme appear in a story about the 4th century thinker Tsou Yen 鄒衍 (traditionally associated with the Five Elements school), in the Confucian *Han shih wai chuan* 韓詩外傳, and in the *Teng Hsi tsu* 鄧析子, a late collection of fragments Legalist in complexion.<sup>51</sup> Tsou Yen's version is said to have been his answer to the 'White horse' argument on a visit to Kung-sun Lung:

彼天下之辯有五勝三至，而辭正爲下。辯者別殊類使不相害，序異端使不相亂，抒意通指，明其所謂，使人與知焉，不務相迷也。故勝者不失其所守，不勝者得其所求。若是故辯可爲也。及至煩文以相假，飾辭以相(爭) \* 悖，巧譬以相移，引人聲使不得反其意，如此害大道。夫辯紛爭言而競後息，不能無害君子。

"The disputation recognised throughout the world has 'five wins and three arrivals',<sup>52</sup> of which correctness in phrasing is the least. The disputant distinguishes separate kinds of thing so that they do not interfere with each other, arranges in sequence different starting-points<sup>53</sup> so that they do not

<sup>51</sup> Liu Hsiang 劉向 (79-8 B.C.), *Pie lu* 別錄 ap. *Shih-chi chi-chieh* 史記集解 ch. 76 (*Shih-chi* 2370 n. 2), for the Tsou Yen story: *Han-shih wai-chuan* SPTK 6/3B/1-4A/3; *Teng Hsi tsu* SPTK 4A/4-6. The passage is also echoed in the account of the School of Names in *Shih-chi* (ch. 130) 3291-2.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the account of Kung-sun Lung's defeat in disputation by K'ung Ch'uan 孔穿 in *K'ung ts'ung-tzu* 孔叢子 SPTK, A 72A-76B (3rd century A.D., but revised from early sources, G(6) 139 n. 18), which ends with the admonition "Don't dispute matters any more with K'ung Ch'uan; in him reason prevails over phrasing, in you phrasing prevails over reason" (其人理勝於辭，公辯勝於理). It may be noticed that the programme of disputation concludes with a denunciation of sophistry as "harmful to the Great Way" (害大道) and "harmful to being a gentleman", K'ung Ch'uan, who as the descendant of Confucius is presented as the greatest gentleman of his age, has been invited to refute Kung-sun Lung with the appeal "This man by trivial disputation slanders the Great Way; why not go and put him right?" (*ut sup.* 72 A/4 此人小辯而毀大道) There is a similar reference to reason and phrasing in disputation in *Jen-yü chih* 人物志 (ch. 4) SPTK, A 18B/1-4, but it is secondary, also echoing *K'ung ts'ung-tzu*, *ut sup.* 76 A/1. *Sheng* 'win' might also be taken as the ordinary word for victory in disputation (cf. § 1/4/24); *chih* 'arrive' has more than one technical usage (cf. A 32 n. 9, NO 9 n. 4).

<sup>53</sup> The *tsuan* 端 'starting-points' are different senses of the word from which the argument starts; if they are confused the argument will be confused. Hsün-tzu, arguing that the thesis "To be insulted is not disgraceful" confuses two uses of 'disgraceful', says: "This has two starting-points. . . . There is moral disgrace and there is social disgrace" (ch. 18, Liang 249)-3 是有兩端矣. . . . 有義辱者，有勢辱者). The *Canons* have a whole sequence on confusable meanings of words (A 76-87), but do not use *tsuan* in this sense.

confuse each other, dredges his ideas and makes his meanings intelligible, and clarifies what he has to say; he shares his knowledge with others and does not busy himself with misleading them. In this way the winner does not fail to make his point and the loser finds what he is seeking. When it comes to elaborating style in order to put up a pretence, adorning phrases in order to make nonsense of the other's case, using subtle comparisons to make him shift his ground, stretching what he literally says so that he cannot get back to his own idea, to behave like this is harmful to the Great Way. Engaging in tangled debates and competing to keep talking the longest cannot but be harmful to being a gentleman."

The new art of disputation affected in different ways all the schools of the 3rd century. Chuang-tzu was a friend of Hui Shih, debated with him and made fun of his logic. Living at the time when reason first became self-aware in China, he is the first conscious anti-rationalist. Disputation is the technique for judging between alternatives; but according to Chuang-tzu it is precisely when we distinguish alternatives, the right and the wrong, the beneficial and the harmful, self and other, that we cut ourselves off from the world we objectify, and lose the capacity of the angler, the carpenter and the swimmer to heed his total situation with undivided attention and respond with the immediacy of a shadow to a shape and an echo to a sound.

A second tendency is represented by the Confucian Hsün-tzu and the Legalist Han Fei tzü (died 233 B.C.), who builds his political theory like Machiavelli on the actual statecraft of princes, and justifies its ruthlessness by the amorality of Heaven and its Way. Both make free use of the resources of disputation, notably in Hsün-tzu's *Right use of names* and the *Interpretation of Lao-tzu* ascribed to Han Fei tzü. Certain lessons of disputation, such as the uselessness of arguing without defining your terms, had been learned by all the major thinkers of the 3rd century. But Confucians and Legalists, however much they may have borrowed from the sophists, despise them for devoting themselves wholly to disputation; they find it absurd that grown men should let logical puzzles divert them from serious ethical and political issues. A third viewpoint is represented by the Mohists. They commit themselves fully to disputation, not because they have forgotten about serious problems but because (like their contemporaries in Greece, of whom they know nothing) they think that only logic can solve these problems definitively. In any case their opportunities of political power are receding and they have plenty of time on their hands.

By 300 B.C. it was evident to all but Confucians that the authority of past sages could no longer be a guide to the changed world of the present. For Chuang-tzu, who in any case denies that the sages could put their



insights into words, any more than the wheelwright can find words to teach his skill of hand, "the men of old, with their untransmittable message, are dead", and their books are only the dregs which their teaching left behind.<sup>54</sup> In spite of the persisting convention of expressing 'A sage king would . . . ' by 'The sage kings did . . . ', no one but the Confucians still gives real weight to past authority. In the 3rd century Han Fei tzu appreciates both the effects of historical change and the unreliability of historical testimony. "If today we wish to inquire into the way of Yao and Shun 3,000 years ago, can there really be any certainty about it? Being certain about it without evidence is foolishness, depending on it though unable to be certain of it is error".<sup>55</sup> He thinks that the Confucian ideal of government was suitable to the small communities of the past, but has become obsolete with the growth of population. The Mohists too are aware of changing conditions and the obsolescence of old authority. The relation between knowledge and temporal change is one of the questions which lead them into the study of disputation. They discover in disputation a certainty (*pi* 必) invulnerable to time, the logical necessity which is eternal.

### 1/1/1/3 Later Mohism

The Mohists, like the other schools, were forced by the metaphysical crisis to rethink their doctrines from the foundations. The last chapter of *Chuang-tzu* gives a glimpse of them arguing over their 'canons', which were presumably the 10 basic doctrines of the school.<sup>56</sup>

*Chuang-tzu* ch. 33 (Kuo 1079/1,2)

相里勤之弟子五侯之徒，南方之墨者苦獲已齒劉陵子之屬，俱誦墨經，而倍誦不同，相謂別墨，以堅白同異之辯相訾，以綺偶不侔之辭相應。

"The followers of Hsiang-li Ch'in's disciple Wu Hou, and the Mohists of the South such as K'u Huo, Chi Ch'ih and Teng-ling-tzu, all recited the Mohist canons but diverged in different directions, they called each other heretical Mohists, chided each other in disputation about the as-hard-to-white and the same-or-different, answered each other in propositions at odds and evens which did not match."

<sup>54</sup> *Chuang-tzu* ch. 13 (Kuo 491/-2).

<sup>55</sup> *Han Fei-tzu* ch. 50 (Ch'en 1080/-3).

<sup>56</sup> This interpretation of *ching* 'canon' was proposed by Hu Shih 胡適 (1919) 185). The reference is not to the dialectical chapters called the *Canons*, since disagreements over questions of logic and science would hardly have led to accusations of heresy. We shall see in commenting on EC 1 that even in *Expounding the canons*, written earlier than the *Canons* themselves, the word *ching* refers to the 10 theses of Mo-tzu.

Han Fei tzu similarly describes the Mohists as split into three branches, with leaders two of whose names agree with those in *Chuang-tzu* (Hsiang-li 相里氏, Hsiang-fu 相夫氏 and Teng-ling 鄧陵氏).<sup>57</sup> We do not know which of these sects participated in the great enterprise on which the Mohists now set out, the organisation of a comprehensive summa of Mohist disputation, consisting of short 'canons' (*ching* 經) designed no doubt to be learned by heart, together with explanations (*shuo* 說) which may at first have been oral and fluid but in due course were written down as a separate collection. It is convenient to date the enterprise about 300 B.C., but it may well have begun considerably earlier and continued until late in the 3rd century. Since all the writings on disputation can be dated in relation to the *Canons* and *Explanations*,<sup>58</sup> it is possible to distinguish three stages in the development of the corpus:

(1) The oldest surviving document is the fragmentary *Expounding the canons* (*Yu ching* 語經). Judging by the opening sentences, the title refers to the problem of 'expounding as canonical' the Will of Heaven and the other doctrines over which according to *Chuang-tzu* the Mohists were arguing and calling each other heretics. The opening section admits the revolutionary consequences, for Mohists as for Confucians, of the concept of nature introduced by Yang Chu. If a man thinks that his evil inclinations come from his nature, and therefore from Heaven, it is useless to urge him to obey the Will of Heaven. "To expound Heaven's will as the right one of the two, and his nature as criminal, is to 'sing' Heaven's will as the wrong one. . . . The criminal will think that egoism is Heaven's will and that what men condemn is the right one of the two, and his nature will be incorrigible." From this point the dialectical writings never again mention either the Will of Heaven or human nature. Instead of trying like Mencius to prove the goodness of human nature, the Mohists set out to rationalise the practical utilitarianism of their tradition. *Expounding the canons* lays the foundations of an ethical system independent of the authority of Heaven, built on the actual benefit and harm, desires and dislikes of individuals.

At the same period the Mohists started the work of assembling a list of accepted definitions, by defining all words in the 10 theses of the school. This document is unfortunately lost.<sup>59</sup> There is evidence of another lost document, on geometrical astronomy, the nucleus of their later work on physics. But we cannot be sure that this was of Mohist origin.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Han Fei-tzu* ch. 50 (Ch'en 1080/3).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. § 2/3 Introduction, § 2/5 Introduction.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. § 1/6/2.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. § 2/4/2/3 Introduction.



However the modern reader, who is not using the *summa* as a practical handbook, requires a rather different approach. The most convenient may be to start with the concepts which underlie all four disciplines (knowing, names and objects, change and necessity) and then examine in turn the first three, including in each the 'a priori' component which belongs to disputation.

### 1/1/2/3 *Knowing, names and objects, change and necessity*

A 3-6 lays down a series of parallels between knowing and seeing. The intelligence (*chih* 知) by which we know is like eyesight; thinking, which is using the intelligence to seek something, not necessarily with success, is like peering; knowing (*chih* (知) \*智) is like seeing; wisdom (*chih* 智) is like clear-sightedness. But knowing differs fundamentally from seeing in that perception ends with the departure of the object, while knowing persists; we are still able to describe the object (A 5). This confirms that the intelligence is a special faculty additional to the five senses (B 46). It remains in us throughout life, even in sleep, when it is quiescent (A 22-25).

The sources of knowledge are report, explanation, and observation (A 80-82. Cf. B 9, 70); the Mohist *summa* is concerned only with explanation (*shuo* 說, defined A 72). Observation has the limitation that it may be of some cases but not of all (A 82). Knowledge is of names, of objects, of how to relate them, and of how to act (A 80).

A name is that by which one calls an object, an object is that which is so called (A 80). According to A 79 'calling' (*wai* 謂) is of three kinds, transferring (*yi* 移, apparently the defining of one name in terms of others), referring (*chi* 舉, picking out an object from others by means of its name), and 'applying' (*chia* 加, addressing, praising, blaming. Cf. A 29, 30).

Like Hsin-tzu in his *Right use of names*, the only other pre-Han text which discusses the problem of common names, the Mohist has a radically nominalistic approach to naming. We name a particular object 'horse' and apply the name to all objects which are like it (*jo* 若), of a kind with it (*lei* 類) (A 78). Judging by a fragment in A 31, the nominalist analysis is extended to the name itself; we refer to the similar objects by sounds which are like the initial sound. Referring by name, we present not the object but an analogue of it (A 32). B 70 disposes of a difficulty in nominalism, that it implies that through the medium of language we can never know X, merely know that it is like something we already know. The Mohist deals with it by taking the example of 'white'; if we know that something is similar in colour to a white thing we do know that it is white. Common

names are distinguished from two other kinds of name: the unrestricted name 'thing', applicable to any object irrespective of similarity; and the proper name confined to one object (A 78). The nominalist position is not argued but taken for granted; although Fung Yu-lan and others have tried to identify the *chih* 指 (literally 'pointings') of Kung-sun Lung as universals, there is no firm evidence that there were any realists in pre-Han philosophy.<sup>66</sup>

For the Mohist, the deepest and most troubling of problems is the relation between knowledge and temporal change. As we noticed at the end of § 1/1/1/2, he lives in an age of rapid social transformation in which ancient authority is no longer an adequate guide to conduct. He has developed the moral teaching of Mo-tzu into an elaborate ethical system justified not by authority but by the procedures of disputation; he believes that, alone among the sages, Mo-tzu taught principles which are necessary (*pi* 必) and therefore invulnerable to time. "The judgments of the sages, employ but do not treat as necessary. The 'necessary', accept and do not doubt" (A 83). This is almost the only issue which can provoke a tone of rhetoric in the Mohist's cool voice. "Among Heaven's constants its presence is prolonged with man" (B 41). "Even if there were no men at all in the world, what our master Mo-tzu said would still stand" (EC 2).

This concern with time is already apparent in the *Explanation* of the definition of 'knowing' in A 5. What distinguishes knowing from perception is that "having passed (*kuo* 過) the thing one is able to describe it". If we knew only by means of the five senses, "knowing as it endures would not fit the fact" (B 46). But the object of knowledge may come to an end (*yi* 已), so that we have to ask ourselves the question "Is it knowing? Or is it supposing the already ended to be so?", which is the kind of doubt arising from *kuo* 'having passed' (B 10). Of a past event we can still say that it 'has been so' (*ch'ang jan* 嘗然, B 61), but we must be careful to locate it in the time of its being so, not in the 'not yet so' (*wei jan* 未然, B 16). The temporal particles *yi* 'having ended/already', analysed A 76) and *ch'ieh* 已 'about to' (defined A 33) are words used to refer to the same events from earlier and later viewpoints (A 33). To use either of them of an event necessarily implies that it has happened (B 61) or will happen (B 51). But it does not follow that future events are destined; the necessity of "If it is about to be so it is necessary that it be so" is simply the logical necessity of the inference, belongs to the realm of names and not of objects, and has no fatalistic implications, as can be seen by constructing the more complex

<sup>66</sup> Cf. G(1) 283-285.

"That which cannot end unless you are about to exert effort necessarily does not end unless you do exert effort" (B 51).

Of the two bridging sequences on knowledge and change, the definitions (A 40-51) begin with the words 'space' and 'duration', while the propositions (B 13-16) consider the relation between the two concepts. In ordinary pre-Han usage the words closest to our own 'space' and 'time' are *yü* 宇 and *chou* 宙; but these tend to suggest rather the 'cosmos as it extends' and the 'cosmos as it endures', from which the concepts of space and time are imperfectly abstracted. The use of them involves some danger of thinking of the two as ultimately identical, so that principles accepted at a certain time as valid throughout the cosmos in its spatial aspect might seem to be valid also for its temporal aspect (that is, for all time). The Mohist retains *yü* 'space', but substitutes for the noun *chou* the nominalised verb *chin* 久 'duration', and his definitions clearly establish the concepts as abstract: "'Duration' is pervasion of different times" (A 40), "'Space(extension)' is pervasion of different places" (A 41). In B 13-16 he shows that space and duration are not mutually pervasive like the hardness and whiteness of a stone; the whole of space is present at any one moment, it moves on, and its movement has duration. When the sage Yao ruled the world his principles of government were appropriate to his times. But when we say that Yao was a good ruler we are talking about the past from our present viewpoint; a man of his time talking about the present would have to call him incapable of ruling (B 16. Cf. also B 53).

The corresponding sequence of definitions proceeds from 'commencement', 'transformation', 'reduction', 'circling round', 'rotating', 'moving', to conclude with the logical words *chin* 止 'stay' and *pi* 必 'necessary' (A 50, 51). "'To 'stay' is to endure as such" (止, 以久也), to be ox and non-horse from the commencement of the object's existence throughout its duration. "The 'necessary' is the unending" (必, 不已也). Necessity belongs to one kind of relation (*ho* 合); "if necessarily we do not have one without the other, the relation is 'necessary'" (A 83), for example elder brother and younger brother (A 51).

The two disciplines which precede the bridging sequences concerned the fitting of names to transitory objects and actions, which has only the temporary validity of 'staying' (cf. NO 1 名實不必\* 合 "Names and objects are not related necessarily"). But the two which follow concern the causal relations between objects in the sciences and the logical relations between names, both of which are necessary.

# 1/1/2/4 Description

1/1/2/4/1. The art of description in the Canons

We live in a constantly changing world of concrete and particular objects (*shih* 實, literally 'solids'), which we describe whether individually or generally by names or strings of names, such as 是石也白 "This stone is white" (NO 1) or 牛馬四足 "Oxen and horses have four legs" (B 12). Although in A 78 the names cited as typical are all nouns ('thing', 'horse', 'Jack'), *ming* 名 'name' covers every kind of word, not only 'stone' but 'white' and 'big' (NO 1), even *chin* 俱 'all' and *to* 多 'much' (B 3), or *huo* 或 'some' (B 33). The Mohist does not think in terms of a realm of universals in which each name can have its own point-by-point counterpart; he thinks of many names as fitting one mutable object, the name of what it is ('stone'), and names of what is so of it, either throughout its duration ('white') or temporarily ('big' until the stone is broken up) (NO 1). Even if a name fits, it may not be applicable when combined with some other name (B 3. Fighting men are 'two' but not 'both two'). *Ch'ieh* 且 'about to' and *yü* 已 'already' have no counterpart at all in the object, being used in saying the same thing before and after the event (A 33). The authors of the *Canons* are well aware that names change their meanings in combination (B 3), and in A 76-87 list the different senses of 12 words common in disputation. But in spite of these subtleties they have no conception of the sentence, as something other than a string of names; for that we must wait for *Names and objects*.

The first of the Mohist disciplines lays down procedures for relating names to objects. The norms presented in A 88-B 12 (and later in *Names and objects*) are rules, not for inferring from known to unknown facts, but for describing known facts consistently. The system of concepts starts from two phonetically and semantically cognate words, *jo*/\**ŃIAK* 若 'like' and *jen*/\**ŃIAN* 然 'so'. It follows from the nominalist analysis in A 78 that I cannot decide that something is so of an object, for example that it is 'circular' or 'square', without committing myself to extending the same name to all objects which are like it in this respect. To use the name consistently I require a *fa* 法 'standard', defined as "that in being like which something is so" (A 70), with which I compare the *miao* 貌, 兒 'characteristics' of the object. Thus as the standard for a circle I may appeal to the idea of it, to another circle or to the compasses (A 70). I may explain 'white' by saying "It is like the colour of this" (B 70), presumably some white thing such as snow, or 'tiger' by drawing a picture and saying "If the characteristics are like the picture it is a tiger" (A 32). Objects sharing the