

On a *Gedankenexperiment* in the *Mozǐ* Core Chapters

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1 Introduction

This paper is a fragment of a larger project aimed at studying the argumentation of the *Mozǐ* Core Chapters (chapters 8–37).¹ One might ask: why study argumentation in these chapters? By way of answering this question, let me offer some observations concerning the character of the text. To put it succinctly: the *Mozǐ* Core Chapters are highly argumentative in nature.

These chapters each contain a fairly clear thesis. These theses are the propositions to be proved or practical-political proposals to be advanced; and proved or advanced they are by arguments. In almost all cases, the arguments advanced seek to establish the theses by appealing to premises less controversial than the conclusions, and through moves that take one from premises to conclusion by recognizably logical means. In many of the chapters, explicit objections – real or imagined, attributed to putative real world opponents or not so attributed – are raised, sometimes elaborated upon, and always replied to using further arguments. In some cases, there are even follow-on objections that pick up from where a reply to a previous objection left off, and more replies to them following.²

I could also note the presence of explicitly methodological passages in our text: most prominently, the so-called “Three Tests of Doctrine” in the “Fei ming” triad. There, the Mohist writers raised the second-order issue of the general conditions that must be met if any doctrine is to be established or rejected. The discussions are both tantalizingly and maddeningly brief – not to mention the fact that a slightly different version of “Three Tests” is mentioned in each of the versions. Furthermore, neither the precise nature of these “tests” nor how exactly they are meant to be applied is obvious, even within the “Fei ming” triad; and they are not even explicitly mentioned in the other triads. Still, the existence of such passages that are explicitly methodological in nature confirms the general impression that whoever wrote these chapters must have been impressively committed to argument.

Finally, when the *Mozǐ* is compared to other philosophical texts of the classical period – e.g., the *Analects* and *Mencius* – it is hard not to gain the impression that the Mohist writers prioritized the requirements of argument over literary and aesthetic considerations.³ In addition,

1 It is generally agreed that these chapters exhibit a relative unity that sets them apart from other portions of the *Mozǐ*. See e.g., Stephen Durrant, “A Consideration of Differences in the Grammar of the Mo Tzu ‘Essays’ and ‘Dialogues,’” *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977–1978). 248–267; and also his earlier *An examination of textual and grammatical problems in Mo-tzu* (PhD Diss., University of Washington, 1975).

2 One example would be the second objection in “Jian’ai C” (16/35). This objection presupposes and even references the reply to the previous (first) objection. Almost the whole of “Ming gui C” is of this nature. All references to the *Mozǐ* text will use the chapter and line numbers in the Harvard-Yenching Concordance edition of the text. Translations are my own.

3 A similar point is also attested in Chapter 32 of the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子: “The King of Ch’u [Chu] remarked to T’ien Chiu [Tian Jiu]: ‘Motse [Mozi] is of course an eminent scholar. Yet, while his personality is fine, much of his speech is not lucid. Why is this?’ ‘Formerly the Lord of Ch’in [Qin] was

some would argue that Mohist arguments exerted an influence upon the argumentative practices found in texts such as the *Mencius*, among others.⁴ The study of argumentation in the *Mozzi* Core Chapters thus holds not only intrinsic interest in its own right, but is useful also for the light it might bring to our understanding of the philosophical practice of the period – and perhaps more ambitiously, to our understanding of philosophical argumentation in general.

All of the above observations stand even where we find the arguments in the *Mozzi* unconvincing; and we often do. Here, I am reminded of what J. L. Austin said of Gilbert Ryle's book, *The Concept of Mind*. To paraphrase: there is much (in the book) that is true, and the rest are at least false.⁵ What he meant was that the untrue parts are at least not meaningless. I think the same can be said of the many parts of the *Mozzi* that leave us unpersuaded – they may be false, perhaps even outrageously so, but they are seldom vacuous. More revealingly, our own reservations are often already given voice in the objections raised in the text, even if the replies leave us unconvinced. The Mohist writers themselves do not seem unaware of the difficulties their own arguments faced. And in some cases at least, it is entirely possible that we find the arguments “not logically convincing”⁶ because we have not properly understood the argument at all. (That last claim is, of course, something to be shown in each case.)

If one is persuaded that the topic: “argumentation in the *Mozzi* Core Chapters” is something worth our attention, a new question arises. What exactly is this thing “argumentation” that I am proposing to study? There are various possibilities:

- (1) The actual arguments employed in the text to establish the various theses – e.g., that *jian'ai*, “concern for people without distinction”, is the solution to all of the harms to the world and ought to be promoted, that the doctrine that “fate exists” ought to be denied and, in fact, its propagation condemned, that there exist ghosts and spirits which reward the just and punish the wicked, etc. – in other words, the substantive grounds and reasons ad-

sending his daughter,’ came the reply, ‘to marry the Prince of Chin [Jin]. He asked Chin to furnish the clothes and adornments for the bridal party. Seventy beautifully dressed bridesmaids were sent to Chin in her company. The Prince of Chin became charmed by one of the maids and paid no attention to the Lord’s daughter. The Lord then may be said to have succeeded in marrying the maid but not his daughter. There was a man of Ch’u selling pearls in Cheng [Zheng]. He made a casket of fragrant wood and perfumed it with olea fragrance and xanthoxylum. He ornamented it with pearls and jades, adorned it with roses, and beautified it with feathers. A man of Cheng bought his casket but returned his pearls. This peddler may be said to be skilful in selling caskets but not pearls. Now the current discussions all emphasize the rhetorical and oratorical qualities. Enjoying their literary style, the ruler will forget their implications. The teachings of Motse intend to expound the ways of the ancient kings and explain the doctrine of the sages. If he should emphasize the lucidity of form, people would treasure it as literature and overlook its true worth. The implications would then be lost in the style and this would be similar to the man of Ch’u selling pearls and the Lord of Ch’in marrying his daughter. Therefore much of Motse’s speech is not lucid”]; translated and cited in: Yi-pao Mei, *Motse: The Neglected Rival of Confucius* (London: Probsthain, 1934), 58–59.

- 4 Concerning the Mohist influence on Mencius, see e.g., Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (New York, Oxford University, 1992), 153–174, and David Nivison, “Motivation and Moral Action in Mencius,” in Bryan van Norden (ed.), *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 96–104.
- 5 “Not only is the book stimulating, enjoyable and original, but a quite unusually high percentage of it is true, the remainder at least false”; quoted in Daniel C. Dennett, “Introduction” in Ryle, Gilbert, *The Concept of Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), xiv.
- 6 Burton Watson, *The Basic Works of Mozi* (New York: Columbia University, 1963), 15.

vanced in support of these theses; I could examine these – whether the arguments have any rational claim whatsoever on our assent (or the assent of their intended target), and if so, on what conditions.

- (2) How the text goes about advancing the various theses, the formal features of the arguments, recurring patterns of inference or *topoi* (to borrow an Aristotelian word), any implicit or explicit logic, the implicit and explicit methodology concerning how doctrine is established, and how linguistic markers (logical particles, inference words) are used to flag the presence of, and to structure, arguments.
- (3) How the text goes about convincing its intended audience or audiences, the strategies of persuasion employed, the implicit or explicit rhetoric, how the intended targets of persuasion are perceived – as an undifferentiated “universal audience” or as individuals and groups that come with specific and possibly conflicting background assumptions and class interests, and if the latter, the tactics used for persuading the different groups within the audience class.

Each of the above sets of issues has some claim to the title “argumentation in the *Mozzi* Core Chapters”. So which group or groups of issues am I proposing to study? Before moving on, let me say that – in agreement with the spirit of the “Research Questions” put out by the conference organizers – students of ancient Chinese texts “risk overlooking” important things in the objects of their study when we ignore the matters listed above – including the second and third group – and “directly search for ideas or opinions”. I would add: all the more so when the text, as in this case, is a particularly argumentative one. What I want to present in the remainder of this introduction is the following *caveat*: despite the real distinction that exists between the three aspects of “argumentation”, there is ultimately no viable way to attend to (2) and (3) in these ancient texts in isolation of (1). I am not saying one cannot have an investigation into a purely formal logic or a thoroughly general rhetoric. What I am proposing is that there is no viable way to somehow study the purely formal or persuasive features of a philosophical text (such as the *Mozzi*) in abstraction from the substantive – doctrinal – arguments without thereby failing to do justice to the subject matter.

Here, I do not have a comprehensive and fully worked out argument as much as a mass of considerations and intuitions – strictly speaking, non-conclusive – in favour of such a stance.⁷ I will only highlight two: one general, and one specific to the *Mozzi*.

First, when studying philosophical argumentation, while it might appear sound to look to the purely formal features of arguments before considering its substance, there may be no question begging way to do so. This is because the identification of the formal features of argument (and for that matter, an appreciation of its persuasive intent) presupposes a prior recognition of the presence of an argumentative context in the first place. But the said recognition cannot simply proceed by reference to the so-called formal (or persuasive features) without begging the question as to their identity as features of arguments in the first place.

Second, in the case of the *Mozzi* Core Chapters, a temptation exists for the student to look first at the explicitly methodological statements – the “Three Tests of Doctrine” laid out in “Fei ming” – and attempt to understand the rest of the text using it. Allied to this is the temp-

7 My own understanding of the matter is influenced by Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge University, 1958).

tation to see the Mohists as relying upon either one unitary method (or a small set of methods) that can be classified under the rubric of the “Three Tests”. But this procedure assumes from the onset that the actual argumentative practices of the *Mozzi* Core Chapters really do come down to one or at least a small number of methods, and furthermore, these methods somehow match the “Three Tests”. Reading the Core Chapters on the basis of such assumptions carries with it the danger of our subjecting the actual arguments in the text to procrustean treatment. In fact, even within the “Fei ming” triad, a whole variety of modes of argumentation are employed, modes that are not easily reducible to a few basic types that can be readily correlated with the “Three Tests”.⁸

If the above is right, then any investigation into “argument and persuasion in ancient Chinese texts” – and in particular, in the *Mozzi* Core Chapters – cannot sidestep a concurrent direct confrontation with the “ideas or opinions”; that is, “ideas or opinions” in the sense of the substantive grounds and reasons that are advanced in the texts.

In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to illustrate some of the concerns voiced above by analyzing an extended argument in the “Shang tong” triad of chapters. The argument I am going to discuss is found in all versions of “Shang tong”.⁹ A part of the exposition will aim at showing how it is indeed the same broad argument that is found in the versions. I do not mean to suggest that there are no differences between the versions or that the differences are unimportant – B and C contain important additional arguments that purport to establish the same thesis by appealing to the ancient sage kings. In B, this comes in the context of a reply to an objection (see 12/41–42). Furthermore, there is material unique to C (13/1–7) that provides information concerning the rhetorical context of the argument. But despite the above, I believe we would not understand the differences between the versions without first attending to the apparently identical argument they share. These are differences on a theme, and different uses to which the same argument has been put.

The argument to be examined can be characterized as a thought experiment (or *Gedankenexperiment*, as it is sometimes called).¹⁰ The argument can roughly be summarized thus: consider a hypothetical scenario in which people are without leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment, i.e., various forms of social and political authority and their attendant coercive apparatus. On the basis of certain (implicit) assumptions about human motivation and action, infer that people would hold to a variety of conflicting moralities, and consequently, be in a state of universal anarchy if the conditions described in the scenario were to be realised. This is meant to show that, holding fixed assumptions about human motivation and action, the pres-

8 This is not the same as saying that there may well be only a comparatively small set of substantive considerations by reference to which the Mohists’ proposals and theses in the Core Chapters are argued for. I believe that, on the whole, there is such a limited set of considerations, and they ultimately revolve around benefit and harm to the world. But this is not something that I can argue for at length here. My point is only about the modes of argumentation that can be found in the Core Chapters.

9 The argument takes up almost all of version A (11/1–22), and about half each of B (12/1–31; out of 76 lines in the Harvard-Yenching edition) and C (13/7–42; out of 60 lines). There is a postscript of 3 lines that introduces a new argument at the end of A (11/22–25). A much expanded version of this “new argument” is also found in B (12/31–41) but not in C (cf. 13/42).

10 It was Ernst Mach (1838–1916) who coined the term. See e.g., Roy A. Sorensen, *Thought Experiments* (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 51.

ence of leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment establishing a consistently unified morality is a necessary condition for social-political order.

An important *caveat* is in order. In saying that this argument in the “Shang tong” chapters “can be characterized as a species of a thought experiment”, I am not claiming that the Mohist writers themselves necessarily intended or saw it that way. Rather, what I aim to show is that interpreting the passages of “Shang tong” in the spirit of a thought experiment allows us to make good sense of the argument as it is presented in the text.

Since I will attempt to show how my interpretation in fact derives from the text, various aspects of the exposition will of necessity be interpretative – this cannot be helped given the terseness of the text. My interpretation will be guided by the following two concerns: it must make good sense of the text (given the linguistic and intellectual-historical context); it ought, wherever possible, to make good sense in being intelligible and plausible as an argument in its own right. Obviously, there is no guarantee that the two concerns will be compatible with one another in every case. For instance, it is possible that what we have before us is a flawed argument. But even should that be so, it is something which I will have to discover, and to do so by first attempting the best construction of the argument.

2 Opening Moves

子墨子言曰：古者民始生未有刑政之時...

The doctrine of Master Mozi: In ancient times when the people were first engendered, before there were any laws and criminal punishment... (11/1)

子墨子曰：方今之時，復古之民始生未有正長之時...

The doctrine of Master Mozi: If from the present we look back to ancient times when the people were first engendered, before there were rulers or leaders... (12/1)

故子墨子曰：...古者天之始生民未有正長也，百姓為人...

The doctrine of Master Mozi: ...in ancient times when Heaven first engendered the people, before there were rulers or leaders, the hundred surnames rule... (13/7)

All three versions begin the argument by appealing to ancient history – or so it seems. One standard interpretation of “Shang tong” is that here and in the sequel, the Mohists are giving us an account of the “origin of the state”.¹¹ But I think this is problematic and requires further consideration.

Let me begin by noting that this is not the usual “ancient times” of the sage kings (e.g., Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, Wen 文, Wu 武) or wicked tyrants (Jie 桀, Zhou 紂) that is normally cited in the *Mozzi*, but a prehistoric time presumably even more ancient than that – “when the people were first engendered”. What is conspicuously absent here is the citation of ancient texts or traditions to back up the account – a significant detail given the usual practice in the *Mozzi*. In fact, no such citation occurs within the presentation of the argument itself in any of the versions (i.e., 11/1–25, 12/1–41, 13/7–52), though they do occur in B and C outside the presentation of the main argument (e.g., 12/44–45, 49–50, 13/46–48). What the

11 See e.g., Mei, *Motse*, 110–113; Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1985), 142; Agnus C. Graham, *The Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 45–46. To be fair, these writers think that the account is meant to be both about the origin of the “state” or “human order”, and also to throw light on the nature of the same.

above points to us is a need for more reflection concerning what exactly this reference to antiquity is supposed to achieve – how exactly does it function argumentatively? To say the least, whatever is going on here cannot be easily framed in terms of an appeal to the authority of ancient exemplars. There are no ancient sage kings in this account, whose examples the rulers are enjoined to emulate, or ancient tyrants, whose examples they are counselled to avoid.

Similar questions arise when we consider the rhetorical context of the argument. Versions B and C explicitly mention an assumed audience of rulers and gentlemen the likes of whom the argument is meant to persuade in view of offering such counsel as would improve their government (see 12/75–76 and 13/58–60; also 13/1–3). This implies that the arguments are meant to be directly relevant to the contemporary world. And though no audience is explicitly mentioned in version A, it is at least probable that the same general considerations apply here, too. If this is correct, then even though the argument begins by referring to a prehistoric world, it really aims to make a point about the contemporary world all along; the only question is: how? Actually, the question will still require an answer even if we insist that the account is meant to be a claim about “what really did happen in the past”.

Let me make the following interpretative hypothesis: I propose that we take the opening remarks as suggesting a thought experiment that reconstructs what must have happened given certain conditions – as opposed to a recounting of what did happen.¹² The eventual aim is not so much to state a truth about the past, but rather to draw a conclusion about the way human beings are in the present. We can think of the proposal this way: it is as if the reader is being asked to imagine how human beings – as we know them, given our background assumptions concerning human action and motivation – would behave in a novel setting; the novel setting in this case being the condition once upon a time when there was a complete absence of rulers and leaders, laws and criminal punishments, etc.¹³ I said “human beings as we know them”, because otherwise there is no end to the possibilities, no constraints that we might imagine. But in order that the argument does issue in determinate conclusions about the way human beings (“we”) are in the present, something has to be held relatively fixed. The alternative is that instead of an argument by thought experiment, we would have at best an exercise in free association.

A further discussion of the logic of the argument will have to wait until section 5. At this point in my exposition, the above is meant to be an interpretative hypothesis on my part,

12 Some indication of what I am thinking of in the text itself is, first, the qualifying “it might be said” (蓋其語) in A and B; and second, the peculiar formulation in B: 方今之時，復古之民始生: “If from the present we look back to ancient times...” perhaps implying that *if* we were to look back (now), this is what we *would* see. Note also that saying “what *must* have happened is X” is not the same as saying “what *must* have happened is X, *given* that Y”. In the latter case, the modality is conditional.

13 My proposal is akin to the spirit of the procedure adopted by Rousseau: “The Inquiries that may be pursued regarding this Subject ought not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin, and comparable to those our Physicians daily make regarding the formation of the world”; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, “Exordium”, paragraph 6, in *The Discourses and other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), 132. Likewise a reading of Hobbes’ “state of nature” argument: “Hobbes’s account does not presuppose that the state of nature has ever existed historically. It is an ‘ideal’ or limiting case in which every vestige of authority and organization has been imagined away”; J. W. N. Watkins, *Hobbes’ System of Ideas* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 72.

albeit an educated one. It is to be considered acceptable by the explanatory power it affords in allowing us to make sense of the argument of the “Shang tong” triad.

So what is this hypothetical scenario? It is variously described in the versions: there are no laws and criminal punishments (A), there are no rulers and leaders (B, C) and the hundred surnames (i.e., the common people) rule (C) – that is not that they form a democracy, but that no one is really ruling. But I think the differences are not significant for my present purposes. First, the absence of rulers and leaders, though unstated, is implied in A – after all, the text later goes on to say that the chaos arose from the lack of rulers and leaders (11/5). Second, an absence of laws and criminal punishment is also implicit in B and C, since plausibly, there can only be laws and criminal punishments if there are rulers and leaders to speak of in the first place – both as those who established the regulations and as those who are agents of the same regulations. Finally, the political independence of “the hundred surnames” (i.e., the common people) is definitely implied by both A and B given the lack of rulers and leaders;¹⁴ in fact, I suspect that the ancient Chinese would consider the two descriptions synonymous. The three versions are variations on a single theme. Note, however, that the universal anarchy that eventually follows is not meant to be built directly into the scenario as described – it is supposed to be inferred from the description of the scenario plus assumptions about human action and motivation. To do otherwise will be to beg the essential question.

In sum, the various descriptions suggest a world – peopled by human beings such as ourselves to be sure – devoid of all social-political authority (rulers and leaders; the people rule themselves) and its attendant coercive apparatus (laws and criminal punishment). I will henceforth refer to the scenario as “the Hypothetical Scenario” (HS) for short. Note that HS as described is not a blanket absence of any society whatsoever. As we shall see, it is implicitly assumed throughout the argument that human beings are social even in HS; that being an essential part of the whole problem about us.

3 The Moral Basis of Conflict

蓋其語人異義。是以一人則一義，二人則二義，十人則十義。其人茲眾，其所謂義者亦茲眾。是以人是其義，以非人之義，故交相非也。

It might be said that everyone had a different *yì*. And so one man had one *yì*, two men had two *yì*, ten men had ten *yì*; the more men, the more of what each called *yì*. And so each affirmed his own *yì* so as to condemn other people’s *yì*, consequently they condemned each other in their mutual interactions. (11/1–2)

蓋其語曰：「天下之人異義」。是以一人一義，十人十義，百人百義，其人數茲眾，其所謂義者亦茲眾。是以人是其義，而非人之義，故相交非也。

It might be said: The people of the world each had a different *yì*. And so one man had one *yì*, ten men had ten *yì*, a hundred men had a hundred *yì*; the more the number of men, the more of what each called *yì*. And so each affirmed his own *yì* so as to condemn other people’s *yì*, consequently they condemned each other in their mutual interactions. (12/1–2)

14 From the rest of the chapters, it can be inferred that “leaders and rulers” include everyone from the highest *tianzì* all the way down to the village chief.

若苟百姓為人，是一人一義，十人十義，百人百義，千人千義，逮至人之眾不可勝計也，則其所謂義者亦不可勝計。此皆是其義而非人之義。

Since the hundred surnames rule, one man had one *yi*, ten men had ten *yi*, a hundred men had a hundred *yi*, a thousand men had a thousand *yi*; and so on until there were so many men they became innumerable, and what each called *yi* also become innumerable. All affirmed his own *yi* so as to condemn other people's *yi*. (13/7–10)

The first conclusion drawn from the description of HS – and this is consistent throughout the versions – is that each person has his own *yi* 義, that is, the *yi* of each person differs from that of others. Before we can understand this inference (let alone critically assess it) we need to know what it means that people have the same or different *yi*. Scholars point out that *yi* is cognate to a homophone 宜 (*yi*^a), meaning “fitting”, thus suggesting the notion of “conduct that is fitting to one’s role or status” or more generally, “the fitting thing to do in relation to parents, rulers, and also to self”.¹⁵ In the rest of the *Moxi* outside of “Shang tong”, *yi* more or less take senses that are similar to the above though the Mohists present their own distinctive account of what constitutes the proper demands of *yi*. But these usual associations do not prepare us for the possibility that there can be people holding to different *yi*.

Though the text does not provide much by way of an explanation at this point, we can deduce an interpretation from later passages found in all three versions of “Shang tong”. Looking ahead, we see that the solution to the chaos in HS is supposed to be, among other things, the establishment of a unified *yi*. Everyone, from the *tianzi* 天子 to the lowliest peasant, is supposed to share the same *yi* (see 11/16, 19, 22; 12/8, 10, 11, 18, 22, 26, 31; 13/22, 27, 34, 41). There are ample passages describing what such a situation is supposed to be like (11/9–22, 12/12–41, 13/22–42 *passim*). There is a very illuminating passage in version C describing just what it means when rulers (“those above”) do not have the same *yi* as those they rule over (13/18–22).

From the above passages (the reader is enjoined to read them for himself), this much seems to be implied: Two agents have the same *yi* just in case they consider the same sorts of words and actions, and, by extension, the people who say or do these things, to be good (*shan* 善), fit for approval (*shi* 是), praise (*yu* 譽) or reward (*shang* 賞) – or not good, i.e., bad (*bu shan* 不善), fit for disapproval (or condemnation, *fei* 非), blame (*hui* 毀) or punishment (*fa* 罰). And to the extent that they do not agree, they do not have the same *yi*.

We can think of each distinct *yi* as a set of opinions concerning what counts as “conduct that is fitting to one’s role or status” or “the fitting thing to do in relation to parents, rulers, and also to self”.¹⁶ Furthermore, these opinions govern the way the person who holds to them would assign certain evaluative predicates (“is good”, “is bad”), his reactive moral attitudes (“approval”, “disapproval”), their expressions (“praise”, “blame”), and his attitudes towards the fitness of retributive sanctions (“punishment”, but also “reward”).¹⁷ This means: to say

15 Graham, *Disputers* 11, 45. See also Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1997), 25.

16 An agent's *yi*, if verbalized, would presumably be a “doctrine” or “maxim” (*yan* 言; see 46/55, 56, 58–60). To say that two persons have conflicting *yi* is thus to say that they possess conflicting reflective views about what is *yi* and what *bu yi*; and the two views, if verbalized, would give us two conflicting *yan*.

17 This is a very rough account: it does not, for example, spell out the relations between an X being good, and its being praiseworthy, or fit for approval, or worthy of reward; and we should not assume in advance that the Mohists take any one of these predicates to entail the rest. But such *minutiae* of moral theory are not really necessary for the broadly political argument advanced in “Shang tong”.

that in HS, each person holds to his own *yi* which differs from the *yi* held to by others is to say that in HS, people all disagree about what actions, words, kinds of people are good or bad, fit for approval or disapproval, praise or blameworthy, suit for reward or punishment, etc.¹⁸ Note that strictly speaking, each person's *yi* in HS is only "called" so by its adherent. The text is silent as to whether any of them holds to the genuine *yi*.

Having affirmed that HS would be a state of extreme moral diversity in the sense described above, all three versions – in nearly identical language – infer that people would be in the habit of condemning each other on the basis of their *yi*: each person, affirming [i.e., adhering to, lit.: "approving"] his own *yi*, disapproves of or condemns other people's *yi*. Note that though the text speaks of people condemning each other's *yi* on the basis of their own *yi*, the sense of the text seems to point in the direction of them condemning each other, i.e., the other person understood as someone holding to a conflicting *yi* and *ipso facto*, as someone who approves of what ought to be disapproved of or condemned.¹⁹

The last point is important because it suggests the following possibility: while each *yi* in HS is in a very real sense subjective or private to its adherent, it is nevertheless also in some ways public and objective in nature. As noted, people in HS disapprove of others on the basis of the *yi* they hold to; and in the world after the establishment of rulers, leaders, laws and criminal punishment, we read about the people approving or disapproving, considering as good or bad, worthy of punishment or reward, etc., someone else's words or actions – on the basis of the *yi* that is now common to the people and their rulers. But approving or condemning the action or word of someone else on the basis of the *yi* I adhere to presupposes that I am taking my *yi* to be regulative of not just of me, my own actions and words, but also of other people, their actions and words. Furthermore, given the manifest moral conflict in HS, when I – as a denizen of HS – condemn someone on the basis of my *yi*, I am taking my *yi* to be regulative of the other person, his actions and words, whether or not he happens to hold to the same *yi*.

Note also that though the text does not explicitly mention the moral reactive sentiments – e.g., anger – it is not difficult to imagine an extension of the above to cover them as well. In fact, such an extension will go a long way in making more compelling the account of how moral diversity led to open conflict in HS.

- 18 Closer reflection, however, reveals that this formulation (if taken literally) will probably not be sufficient for the requirements of the rest of the argument. Presumably what is required by the subsequent argument is not just that people in HS each has different *yi*, but that the various *yi* are in conflict. But we can roughly understand the latter in the following manner: two distinct *yi* – Y_1 and Y_2 – are in conflict over object of evaluation X if and only if Y_1 says that X is good, worthy of approval, etc., while Y_2 says it is bad, worthy of disapproval, etc.
- 19 Consider the following. Suppose we have two agents, S_1 and S_2 , who are adherents of *yi* Y_1 and Y_2 respectively where Y_1 and Y_2 are in conflict over the evaluation of X: according to Y_1 , action X is good and praiseworthy, etc., but according to Y_2 , X is bad and blameworthy, etc. Now consider the five sentences: (1) S_1 disapproves of X; (2) S_1 disapproves of S_2 – as someone who does X; (3) S_1 disapproves of S_2 – as someone who considers X worthy of approval; (4) S_1 disapproves of S_2 – as someone who is an adherent of Y_2 ; (5) S_1 disapproves of Y_2 . The text is as terse as it can get and all five phenomena may well be included without too much of a conscious distinction being made between (3)/(4) and (5). Be as it may, something like (3) or (4) appear to render the best sense of the passage above. That is, though the text speaks in terms of people condemning each other's *yi* on the basis of their own *yi*, the more plausible thing to say is that they condemn each other – that is, the other understood as an agent who holds to a conflicting *yi* and *ipso facto*, as someone who approves of what ought to be disapproved of or condemned.

From the first person point of view, I am not criticizing the other on the basis of what I happen to believe to be right and proper; rather, I believe that I am criticizing the other on the basis of what is objectively right and proper. In other words, when people in HS disapprove of others, the thought from the first person point of view is: “I am disapproving of the person as someone who holds to a wrong and therefore reprehensible *yi*.” The thought is not “he is someone who holds to a *yi* that conflicts with mine”, but “he is holding to an objectively wrong ‘so-called’ *yi*.”²⁰ This seems to be what is meant by the text saying that each person condemns the other person’s *yi* on the basis of his own *yi*, and I believe that this interpretation helps us make sense of the viciousness of the state of war in HS.

To summarize the progress of the discussion so far: the first set of conclusions drawn from the description of HS is, roughly, that there would be as many distinct and conflicting *yi* as there are people, on the basis of which people condemned each other. Hopefully, I have made some headway in rendering a plausible interpretation of the move; but is the inference a good one? Let me resolve one apparent objection first: it seems hard to make sense of people holding to any conception of right and proper conduct that includes “conduct that is fitting to one’s role or status” and “the fitting thing to do in relation to parents, rulers, etc” – an inherently social conception – in HS. But this objection fails to enter into the spirit of the argument, and misunderstands the terms of the thought experiment.

As mentioned, HS is not meant to be “human beings minus every vestige of society”. It seems implicitly assumed throughout that human beings are very much social creatures; and part of our sociality is expressed in possessing *yi* that is intended to be objective and regulative of not just my own conduct, but the conduct of other people as well. The argument holds this assumption fixed but claims that minus the various forms of social-political authority and their attendant apparatus of coercion, the situation will atrophy into one in which every man holds to what he thinks is right in his own eyes.

But one might probe deeper and ask: why should the presence or absence of social and political authority have any impact on the number of conceptions of *yi*? And even granting a connection, it seems much more plausible to think that even if there were to be deep and significant divisions between the *yi* of people in HS, these divisions would still fall into a relatively small number of opposing views – in any case, a number much smaller than the number of people in HS.

I do not know if these objections can be answered at all, nor am I going to try too hard here as opposed to just flagging the issue for consideration. The Mohists seem to be counting on an assumption that “rulers and leaders, laws and criminal punishment” constitute a set of necessary conditions for any degree of moral unity among people worth talking about. Perhaps they think that even the limited unity of *yi* enjoyed within groups set amidst larger disagreements with other groups depends on the existence of “leaders and rulers” – the heads of the household, the village elders, or, in a different context, the pastors and elders of the local

20 In other words, the thought is not just that the other person disagrees with me, but that (I believe) he is objectively wrong. While I think the account will make sense only if we enter into each adherent’s point of view, it is fascinating to observe the text describe the overall picture in such a completely third-person and detached manner. Recall that the entire account is still neutral with regards to the question as to whether there are any genuinely objective *yi* at all.

churches, mosques or synagogues – that make possible the local unity in the first place (see e.g., 13/28–29, 35–36). This is not an implausible assumption.²¹

In any case, the Mohists may have overstated their case, i.e., the hyperbolic “one man had one *yì*, ten men had ten *yì*, a hundred men had a hundred *yì*, etc.” What they need for the argument may just be the weaker and more plausible claim that in HS, many people are in moral conflict with many other people.

4 A State of War

是以內者父子兄弟作怨惡，離散不能相和合。天下之百姓，皆以水火毒藥相虧害，至有餘力，不能以相勞，腐朽餘財，不以相分，隱匿良道，不以相教，天下之亂，若禽獸然。」 And so within [the family], father and son and elder and younger brothers engaged in mutual aversion, were estranged from each other, unable to achieve harmony or reach any agreement with each other. The hundred surnames of the world all sought the harm of each other with water, fire, and poison, while surplus energy was not used in mutual aid, surplus goods allowed to rot rather than shared, excellent teachings kept secret rather than taught to each other. The chaos in the world is like that among birds and beasts. (11/3–5)

內之父子兄弟作怨讎，皆有離散之心，不能相和合。至乎舍餘力不以相勞，隱匿良道，不以相教，腐朽餘財，不以相分，天下之亂也，至如禽獸然，無君臣上下長幼之節，父子兄弟之禮，是以天下亂焉。

Within [the family], father and son, elder and younger brothers engaged in mutual hatred, all had the spirit of estrangement from each other, unable to achieve harmony or reach any agreement with each other. Surplus energy was not used in mutual aid, surplus goods allowed to rot rather than shared, excellent teachings kept secret rather than taught to each other. The chaos in the world is like that among birds and beasts. The regulations governing the relationship between ruler and minister, superior and inferior, elder and junior do not exist, nor the ritual ordering those between father and son, elder and younger brothers. Such was the chaos in the world. (12/3–5)

是以厚者有鬥而薄者有爭。

And so there was fighting among the powerful and conflict among the weak. (13/11)

The outcome of the moral conflict described in HS is, to borrow some words from Thomas Hobbes, a state of war of “every man against every man.”²² On this score, the description

21 There seems to be a widely held opinion in traditional Chinese political thinking that moral instruction is a part of government’s function and prerogative. This and related assumptions might be loosely grouped under the rubric of “the unity of governance and instruction” (政教合一), and they are largely shared by, say, the Confucians (see *Analec*s 2.20, 12.17, 13.9). I think there are plausible routes from these assumptions to the thought that without the instructing function provided by rulers and leaders, a function backed by the coercive apparatus of government, people would go their own way and fall into error concerning morals. (cf. also the later reference to “excellent teachings kept secret rather than taught to each other” 隱匿良道不以相教 that occurs in both A and B; 11/4, 12/4).

22 Hobbes continues his description of the state of nature: “In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), chap. XIII, 82.

offered in C is the least detailed but still points to a general state of mutual conflict in HS; and we can safely say that the descriptions in A and B are meant to imply at least this much. At one level, this is all that is actually needed for the argument: the world in HS is a world in chaos (*luan* 亂), and therefore not a world that would be desirable for anyone to live in. The richer accounts in versions A and B flesh out in excruciating detail what this chaos is like, and to that extent, render its undesirability psychologically more compelling; even if, strictly speaking, they do not add to the argument itself.²³ As we shall see below, is it possible that these additional details may have overstated what the argument could reasonably be expected to show.

Setting the above aside for the moment, let us see what the richer descriptions in A and B come to. According to them, HS is such that: (a) there is mutual aversion between even family members, leading to an inability for them to coexist in harmony (A, B); (b) people seek to harm each other by water, fire and poison (A); (c) they refuse to help each other even when they have strength (A) or treasure (A, B) to spare; (d) they refuse to instruct each other with good ideas they have (A, B); (e) the chaos in the world is as if people are birds and beasts (A, B); and (f) there is no such thing as proper relations between social superiors (e.g., ruler, elder, father, older brother) and inferiors (minister, younger, son, younger brother) (B).

Here, it is possible to see (f) as already implied by the previous stage of the argument: if the people all have different *yí*, then it follows – as a matter of course – that there will be no generally agreed upon regulations and rituals for governing the listed social relations.²⁴ But (a)–(e) paints a by far starker picture. The conflict now takes place with actual blows intended to do real damage, often by any means available (b). There is a widespread failure of social cooperation (c) (d), which may also explain why the available means for physical conflict are “water, fire and poison” – relatively natural items – as opposed to the “weapons, poison, water and fire” we read about elsewhere (16/4, 28/37, 31/3, 78). Without the social cooperation that makes division of labour and specialization possible, the arts and industries necessary for the invention and production of weapons do not exist. This is probably also why the chaos is “like that among birds and beasts” (e). The writers of A and B chose their words carefully.

23 It is possible that a difference between the actual intended audience of B and C explains the fact that the writer of C did not consider it necessary to describe chaos in such detail as the writer of B did. But this is purely a piece of speculation on my part and is not something that receives support from the text.

24 Note that strictly speaking, what (f) amounts to is that such relationships – understood as social roles implying duties and privileges for the persons occupying them – do not exist at all. So even though there are “fathers” and “sons”, “elder and younger brothers” given that there are at least biological families (a) in HS, there is no such thing as a social role “father” such that the person occupying it is obliged to treat the person occupying the role of “son” relative to him in such and such a manner, or for the “son” to be obliged to treat him in such and such a way. That is, the father is to love the son, and the son is to be filial to the father (see e.g., 16/3–4). Though the language is recognizably “Confucian”, it is probably meant to reference a widely accepted conventional understanding of the parent-child relationship. The presence of the natural family in A and B might suggest both a concession on the part of the Mohist that it is much harder to abstract away than other forms of human groupings, and also a covert suggestion that – contrary to e.g., a Mencian position (see *Mencius* 3A5) – there will be no straightforward development from the natural family to more complex forms of sociality.

But recall that the state of war and chaos is meant to be an inference from the fact that people in HS held to conflicting *yi*, and as a result, they saw each other as morally reprobate and were in the habit of condemning each other. Once again: is this a defensible inference? I think it is at least not implausible. First, all that the argument needs to show is that HS is a state of chaos; it does not need to show that everyone is in open and physical conflict with everyone else. If HS is a state of pervasive mutual suspicion and distrust such that the usual fruit of social cooperation or commodious living are impossible, then even if actual fighting by fire, water and poison is only sporadic, I think the Mohists would have made their point. At the very least, even Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi (for instance) would have to agree that HS so described is a state of chaos – how can it be otherwise when there is no Ritual to speak of?

Second, note that the account does not require the presented derivation of chaos to be the only one possible. The three versions do not claim that this is meant to be an account of the cause of chaos in the world *simpliciter* (compare e.g., 14/1–4). It is meant to present one set of sufficient conditions for chaos in the world; and even that aim is subordinated to the demands of the overall argument, viz., to show that the existence of rulers and leaders and a unified *yi* constitute a necessary condition for order in the world. The Mohists should not be troubled by the (reasonable) rejoinder that not all instances of chaos are due to a conflict over *yi*. After all, it is perfectly imaginable that some people come to blows due to a disagreement over “the facts of the case” despite sharing a common *yi*; or because some are reprobate even by the standards of their own *yi*; or because they are perverse and therefore cannot be said to hold to any *yi* at all; or because their passions trumped any sense of *yi* they might have. The present argument abstracts from these possibilities; but as long as it does present a plausibly sufficient set of conditions for chaos, it would have done what is needed. To keep the discussion going, I am going to assume that it did just that.

Having said all that, it is peculiar that the Mohist should choose to focus on disagreement over *yi* (as opposed to a failure to conform to the true *yi*). In one sense, this choice of focus is demanded by the *terminus* of the argument: a unified *yi* is a necessary condition for order. If that is what they want to argue for, it stands to reason that disunity over *yi* as a source of conflict would be the focus of the argument. Given that, the choice of the starting point is a simple function of the projected conclusion. But these remarks also point to the fact that the argument is both strangely concerned with *yi* but also detached from it: the issue is not whether anyone holds to the true *yi*, but only that we need to agree.²⁵

One advantage of the Mohists’ procedure is that they cannot be criticized for deriving the state of anarchy in HS only by dint of having some especially dark and gloomy picture of human nature. There is no “human nature is bad” thesis here. In fact, one might almost say that the parties in HS are portrayed as ultra-moralistic, and that is the whole problem.

Incidentally, the argument’s ambivalent relationship toward the status of people’s sense of *yi* in “Shang tong” is further highlighted in a sequel. Both A and B follow the exposition of the argument with the additional claim that unless the world, even if unified in its *yi*, also

25 This does not mean that the Mohists do not also believe that there is a genuine *yi*. For instance, the “Tianzhi” chapters argue that conformity to the will of heaven is the criterion for *yi*. Elsewhere, the Mohists also appear to argue that practices are *yi* to the extent to which they are productive of benefit to the world (e.g., in “Jiezang” and “Fei yue”). My point is only that the argument of “Shang tong” seems interestingly detached from such considerations.

conforms to Heaven, it is not out of the woods (11/23; 12/31–32). But the argument for *that* claim is that Heaven would visit the world with natural disasters if it is not done (11/23–24, 12/32–33) – a consideration that is not anticipated by nor deducible from the argument until this point. It reads like an afterthought. In this regard, C is the most blatant: the additional argument drops out altogether, and the text merely says at the corresponding point that the world having been brought to order, the Son of Heaven will furthermore organize the *yi* of the world and conform it to Heaven (13/42). The text is silent as to why he should be moved to do so.

5 The Logic of the “Shang tong” Thought Experiment

The conclusion of the argument in the versions is fairly consistent (though there are important variations to which I will have to return later):

夫明乎天下之所以亂者，生於無政長。是故選天下之賢可者，立以為天子。

It is clear that the reason why the world was in chaos, was because there were no rulers and leaders. Hence the most worthy and able one in the world was selected and installed as the Emperor. (11/5–6)

明乎民之無正長，以一同天下之義，而天下亂也，是故選擇天下賢良聖知辯慧之人，立以為天子，使從事乎一同天下之義。

It is clear that the world was in chaos because the people were without rulers and leaders who can unify the *yi* of the world. And so the most worthy, sagacious, and wise man was selected and installed as the Emperor, charged with the task of unifying the *yi* of the world. (12/5–7)

是故天下之欲同一天下之義也，是故選擇賢者，立為天子。

And so the world, desiring that the *yi* of the world be unified, selected a worthy one and installed him as the Emperor. (13/11–12)

The parties in HS escaped from the state of chaos into a state of civil society by calling for the establishment of a hierarchy of subordinate rulers and leaders. The primary function of this hierarchy is basically to implement and consistently enforce by both educational and coercive means a unified *yi*. But that’s what the parties in the hypothetical scenario “must have done”; the conclusion of the thought experiment “for us” is that the existence of leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment establishing and consistently enforcing a unified *yi* is a *necessary condition* for social-political order. As later passages put it, order is established at the level of the household, village, state and the world “only because” (*wei* 唯) the rulers and leaders at each level successfully unified *yi*, e.g., order is achieved in the state because the ruler of the state unified *yi* in the state, etc. (11/15–16, 18–19, 22, 12/21–22, 24/25, 30–31, 13/27, 34–35, 41–42).²⁶ Note that the argument does not say that the existence of leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment establishing and consistently enforcing a unified *yi* constitutes a sufficient condition for social-political order.²⁷

26 On my construal of the *wei* in these passages as “only because” (or perhaps “only if), see Christoph Harbsmeier, *Aspects of Classical Chinese Syntax*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, 45 (London: Curzon, 1981), 130–133.

27 The Mohists clearly did not confuse a necessary and a sufficient condition. The later Mohists certainly did not; see Angus C. Graham, *Later Mohist logic, ethics, and science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University, 1978; repr. 2003), 263–265.

That the above constitutes the conclusion or conclusions drawn by the text itself is clear enough; but the underlying logic needs to be fleshed out. Drawing the strands of the argument together, we can reconstruct the following overall picture: Begin with a set of propositions D (the initial description of HS); show that D entails the proposition p (universal chaos obtains) given K (assumptions concerning human action and motivation); finally, conclude that: if D then p holding fixed K, and therefore: $\neg p$ only if $\neg D$ (by contraposition) holding fixed K.

A more involved formalization could also take into account intermediate steps between D and p . In our case, the chain of entailment – holding fixed K – is from D to q (diversity and conflict over y), then from q to p . From this series, we can conclude that: $\neg p$ only if ($\neg D \cdot \neg q$), and the auxiliary $\neg q$ only if $\neg D$, on assumption that K.²⁸ In other words, the necessary condition for $\neg p$ (universal chaos does not obtain) is $\neg D$ (the situation as described in the scenario does not obtain). On this construction, the overall argument is valid. But is the argument sound?

Note that in order for this argument to be sound, it doesn't have to be the case that D was actually true; nor is it necessary that each of the subsequent entailments (i.e., p and q) were actually true. In other words, the soundness of the argument does not depend on the claim that the world was once really as described by D. Nor does it depend on the claim that everything else described as happening in D – the moral diversity and universal chaos – did happen. What is required, however, is that these things would happen, were D to be true of the world, given the truth of the assumptions (K) concerning human action and motivation.

This does not mean, however, that the Mohist denied the truth of the description of HS as a description of the supposed distant past. In fact, it is entirely possible that they believe that the description holds true, that the world in the distant past was like HS. Rather, my point is that a thought experiment reading of their argument allows us to make better sense of how their conclusion follows from their premises, even though it turns out that on such a reading, the truth of HS as a description of the past becomes irrelevant to the soundness of the argument.²⁹

What about K? It represents the implicit assumptions about the way human beings are that govern each inference step. Take the very first step, for example: given the total lack of social and political authority and their attendant coercive apparatus, it is supposed to follow

28 Alternatively, the conclusion could read: if one desires that $\neg p$ obtains, one ought to desire *ceteris paribus* that ($\neg D \cdot \neg q$) obtains – given K plus (plausible) assumptions concerning practical reasoning. For analogies in other traditions, see: *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy*, ed. Tamara Horowitz and Gerald J. Massey (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).

29 I think it is at least probable that the Mohists actually believed that the account is true of the past, but this is at best a conjecture. More importantly, given my reading of the argument, nothing of consequence to the argument will hang on it. If an opponent were to challenge the truth of the description as a description about the past – e.g., by demanding that the Mohists produce relevant historical evidence – the argument will still stand even if the Mohists are unable to meet such a challenge. Interestingly, Hobbes' account of the state of nature has the same ambiguity – it seems at once a description of the actual history of mankind, but also a mere thought experiment. In response to Bishop Bramhall's objection that the state of nature never occurred, he conceded that "It is very likely to be true, that since the creation there never was a time in which mankind was totally without society"; but his argument is still supposed to work. See Watkins, *Hobbes' System*, 72.

that the situation will atrophy into one in which every man holds to what he thinks is right in his own eyes. The inference presupposes a complex set of assumptions about the way human beings are and the way they would behave or be motivated to act under different conditions. This is probably also a set of assumptions that is at least partly implicit in widely shared opinions. The same can be said for all the rest of the inference steps.

Strictly speaking, the conclusion rests only upon K. So it is in principle possible to work purely from K to the conclusion without having to go through the thought experiment. What the thought experiment does is to render the implications of K (kept implicit) in a vivid way and thus enable a compelling presentation for a case in favour of the conclusion. To the extent that the audience finds the move from D to q or q to p plausible, he is implicitly agreeing with K or at least agreeing with assumptions that are compatible with K. And to the extent that he does not find those moves plausible, he is presupposing a disagreement with K.

Let me now return to the question as to whether the argument is sound. I think it is safe to say that most today would be suspicious of the conclusion. Most people living in modern democratic societies would deny that leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment establishing and consistently enforcing a unified *yi* by educational and coercive means is a necessary condition for social-political order. Such a thesis seems to run counter to our more pluralistic sympathies. But I wonder if our misgivings may be due to a stronger than necessary reading of the argument. What the argument seeks to establish is not exactly that there will be no social-political order unless there is unanimity concerning everything that we would consider to be under the rubric of “justice” or “morality”. Rather, the claim is that social-political order requires an agreement about what actions and words are fit for public praise and blame, and reward and punishment by the public powers. And it is at least debatable whether we do disagree simply with such a conclusion. Let’s say that we are at least half-minded about such a conclusion. In any case, we should not assume in advance that the Mohists’ conclusion would be in agreement with *our* sympathies. It is entirely possible that we ultimately disagree with them; but if that is so, it is incumbent upon us to challenge the soundness of their argument.

I will briefly discuss two further objections. First: suppose we grant the claim: order obtains only if there exist rulers and leaders who make sure (by educational and coercive means) that the situation of everyone’s *yi* being in conflict with everyone else’s *yi* does not obtain. But *that* is hardly the same as the case of everyone’s *yi* being the same – which is the conclusion the Mohists ultimately draw. After all, the negation of “every marble in a bag has a different colour” need not be “every marble has the same colour” (as long as there are more than two marbles). On this objection, while the Mohist argument is arguably valid and sound, it does not establish the conclusion the Mohists thought it did.

In their defense, I think that the explicit conclusion does overreach; but it remains to be seen by how much. Perhaps the conclusion may be more plausibly rephrased as: what is *practically* necessary for order is that the rulers and enough of a majority of the people share the same *yi*, a common *yi* that is backed by the educational and coercive apparatus of government. Once that condition is fulfilled, even those in dissent would think twice before coming out into the open with their opposition. And if they were to be open about their opposition, they could be suppressed by the rest relatively easily. If we think that this reply is acceptable, the above objection would be cogent but not fatal.

A more powerful objection will grant the relevance of above reply but challenge the scope of its effectiveness. Recall that the Mohists' argument pertains not merely to order within a single state, but in *tianxia* – the world – as a whole. Now suppose the world is divided into a number of enclaves each of which has its own set of rulers and leaders enforcing a (locally) unified *yi* and a population that shares this same *yi*; but each enclave's *yi* is in conflict with the *yi* of another enclave. But because the enclaves are so balanced in power, no one enclave (or combination of enclaves) is able to simply attack another without suffering unacceptable loss to itself. One might imagine that given the right conditions, the various enclaves may come to a *modus vivendi* – i.e., a ceasefire – and thus achieve at least some semblance of order among themselves.

Interestingly, there are passages in version C (without any analogies in A and B) that are relevant to our evaluation of this proposed counter-model. Consider:

家既已治，國之道盡此已邪？則未也。國之為家數也甚多，此皆是其家，而非人之家，是以厚者有亂，而薄者有爭。

Now that the household [or clan] is in order, is that all there is to the way of governing the state? That is not all. The state is composed of many household; consequently, all affirm their own household and condemned other household. And so there is fighting among the powerful and conflict among the weak. (13/28–29)

國既已治矣，天下之道盡此已邪？則未也。天下之為國數也甚多，此皆是其國，而非人之國，是以厚者有戰，而薄者有爭。

Now that the state is in order, is that all there is to the way of governing the world? That is not all. The world is composed of many states; consequently, all affirm their own states and condemned other states. And so there is fighting among the powerful and conflict among the weak. (13/35–36)

The thought is that even if each household in a country has a unified *yi*, that condition in itself does not mean that the various households share the same *yi*. And to the extent that *yi* across households conflict, then we are back to the state of chaos except that this time, it is not individuals against individuals but households against households. The same consideration applies in the case of the world/countries.

What the above suggests is that the writer of version C would have appreciated our proposed counter-model but also deny its cogency as an objection. He seems to think that as long as the different local domains fail to share the same *yi*, there will always be the same potential for conflict between them. This thought is also suggested by the very manner of presentation of the argument in C: it is as if the same thought experiment is reiterated through larger and larger groupings (see 13/28, 35) until the conclusion about the necessary condition for order in the world is reached (note the linguistic parallels between 13/10–11, 28–29 and 35–36). Needless to say, this line of thinking presupposes specific and contentious assumptions about the way individuals and groups are motivated to act in face of a known balance of power.

But even if we grant that an inter-enclave ceasefire does not make for order – in the sense that there is always potential for conflict – it is still plausible that sufficient order would be achieved within each enclave. That is, sufficient order such that the worst effects of chaos (described in 11/3–5, 12/3–5) are escaped. In fact, order within a local enclave may be all that is needed for the degree of social cooperation that makes possible division of labour, specialization, the arts and industries – commodious living – and quite possibly even

the ritual distinctions between rulers and ministers, elders and juniors, etc. (see 12/5). This also suggests that the minimalist description of chaos in C (see e.g., 13/10–11; minimalist compared with 11/3–5, 12/3–5) may be deliberate.

6 Closing Remarks

In this paper, I have (hopefully) sketched out a plausible reading of the argument in the “Shang tong” triad, a reading that exhibits its soundness, though probably at the cost of having a conclusion somewhat weaker than the Mohists themselves envisioned. And if one is not persuaded of its soundness, my presentation would also have provided ample material for the construction of a counter – which premise is suspect, which inference illicit? But the stated aim of my presentation is not so much to provide a firm answer to the question whether the Mohists were right, as much as to illustrate how an apparently simple doctrine in fact hides a fairly sophisticated if also elusive argument. Furthermore, this is an argument the logical structure of which we are not led to anticipate from reading the “Three Tests”, or for that matter, from picking apart every inference word that occurs within the relevant passages. If anything, the logical structure of the argument emerges best precisely when its doctrinal substance is directly engaged.³⁰

Appendix: Breakdown of the Argument

	A (11/1–22)	B (12/1–31)	C (13/7–42)
Hypothetical Scenario (HS)	古者民始生未有刑政之時	方今之時，復古之民始生未有正長之時	古者天之始生民未有正長也，百姓為人
Moral diversity and mutual condemning	人異義…其人茲眾，其所謂義者亦茲眾。是以人是其義，以非人之義，故交相非也。	天下之人異義…其人數茲眾，其所謂義者亦茲眾。是以人是其義，而非人之義，故相交非也	人之眾不可勝計也，則其所謂義者亦不可勝計。此皆是其義而非人之義。
Conflict and universal chaos	內者父子兄弟作怨惡，離散不能相和合。天下之百姓，皆以水火毒藥相虧害，至有餘力，不能以相勞，腐朽餘財，不以相分，隱匿良道，不以相教，天下之亂，若禽獸然。	內之父子兄弟作怨讎，皆有離散之心，不能相和合。至乎舍餘力不以相勞，隱匿良道，不以相分，天下之亂也，至如禽獸然，無君臣上下長幼之節，父子兄弟之禮，是以天下亂焉。	是以厚者有鬥而薄者有爭。
The diagnosis	天下之所以亂者，生於無政長。	民之無正長，以一同天下之義，而天下亂也	
The solution	選天下之賢可者，立以為天子。	選擇天下賢良聖知辯慧之人，立以為天子，使從事乎一同天下之義。	是故天下之欲同一天下之義也，是故選擇賢者，立為天子。

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