

MO TSE

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THE thinkers of every race and every age show a distinct tendency to emphasize their differences from each other, while ignoring the most complete identities in their fundamental premises. It is said that, during the Middle Ages, many Franciscan monks would sooner show charity to the blackest heretic than to one of their Dominican brothers in Christ. The bitterest enmities grew up between medieval theologians over such questions as how many angels could stand on the point of a needle. But today, we lump all of these men together as representatives of a single, and a narrowly dogmatic, system of thought.

This tendency has shown itself to an almost unbelievable extent in the history of Chinese thought. Here we have the spectacle of various men, expounding the same philosophy with no more of difference than that one emphasizes more strongly one phase, while another places most stress on another factor, each of whom declares the views of the others to be so dangerous that their spread endangers the very foundations of the universe. These petty quarrels (they were often no more than that) mean little in themselves, but when we consider that the accusations exchanged in them have, in many cases, been written into the accepted histories of Chinese thought, it becomes apparent that they have obscured our understanding of the history of Chinese philosophy to an alarming degree.

In the cases of the thinkers already dealt with, the error is difficult to apprehend. As between Lao Tse and Confucius, there are not only mutual recriminations, but apparent differences of the widest scope. It is only when we penetrate the surface, and look, beyond grandiose generalizations, at their fundamental assumptions

and their practical programs, that we observe the similarities. But when we come to take up Mo Tse the case is quite otherwise. To be sure, Mo Tse was considered the deadly enemy of the Confucian school, and Mencius excoriates him, while he returned attacks with good will and a ready wit. Thus there has grown up the legend that Moism is one of the doctrines antithetic to "Confucianism" or Sinism. But if any student of average intelligence were given the *Analects* and the writings of Mo Tse to study side by side, it is doubtful if he could fail to see the fundamental identity of the two systems, unless he had had the "advantage" of a previous acquaintance with the tradition which denies it.

The dates of Mo Tse²⁹⁴ are in some doubt. Those given by Yi Pao Mei, 470-391 B.C.,²⁹⁵ are probably accurate enough for the present purpose. Mo Tse was given the usual education of a young scholar of the "Confucian" school, destined for government. *Huai Nan Tse* (chap. 21) says of him:

Mo Tse was trained in the orthodox school and disciplined in Confucian ideas. But he felt that the code of propriety was too troublesome and annoying and that elaborate funerals consumed too much money and impoverished the people; that they were unwholesome to life and obstacles to industry. Thereupon he rebelled against the norms of Chou and adopted the regime of Hsia.

Like Confucius, Mo Tse traveled about a great deal, looking for an opportunity to serve as minister to some state, and so put his ideas into practice. He seems, however, to have found only one post, and that for a short time, in Sung. He gathered a number of disciples about him, but did not succeed in founding a permanent school. This was due in great part, no doubt, to the opposition of the "regular" Confucianists to his teachings. "It is no exaggeration to say that the neglect of Motse the man, his system, and his works since the Christian era had been all but universal until the middle of the eighteenth century A.D."²⁹⁶ The recent interest in Mo Tse has been largely due to certain real or fancied resemblances of his teachings to Christianity.

²⁹⁴ Mo Tse means, of course "Master Mo" or "The Philosopher Mo." His full name was Mo Ti. The character *mo* is pronounced either *mo* or *mei*, so that the philosopher may be referred to as Mo Tse, Mei Tse, Mo Ti, Mei Ti, or by the latinization "Micius."

²⁹⁵ Yi-pao Mei, *Ethical and Political Philosophy of Motse* (Ph.D. Thesis, Chicago), p. 31.

²⁹⁶ Mei, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

Mo Tse, like Confucius, was tremendously in earnest. He was genuinely concerned over the poverty and suffering of his people, and no sacrifice of time or personal comfort was too great for him to make for the cause of their welfare, to which he had devoted his life. Like Confucius, Mencius, and Lao Tse, he looked with the greatest abhorrence on the wholesale slaughter which characterized the China of his day, and the eradication of war waged for mere greed was his chief passion. It was this practical interest, this desire above all other things to ameliorate the condition of humanity, which was responsible for the attacks made upon him by the Confucianists, much more than any difference in basic philosophy. Had Mo Tse not preached against the ruinous funerals which often wiped out the patrimony of the poor, and against the prescribed three years of complete inaction in mourning, Mencius and others would probably have been a little more willing to see that his doctrine of "universal love" was, after all, only another way of stating the plea of Confucius for human cooperation and social harmony.

Nevertheless, it was about this doctrine of "universal love" that the fight on Mo Tse centred. Let Mo Tse state it in his own words:

Partiality is to be replaced by universality. . . Now when everyone regards the states of others as he regards his own, who would attack the other's state? Others are regarded like one's self. When everyone regards the houses of others as he regards his own, who would disturb the others' houses? . . . Now, when the states and cities do not attack and seize each other and when the clans and individuals do not disturb and harm one another—is this a calamity or a benefit to the world? Of course it is a benefit. When we come to think about the several benefits in regard to their cause, how have they arisen? Have they arisen out of hate of others and injuring others? Of course we should say no. We should say that they have arisen out of love of others and benefiting others. If we should classify one by one all those who love others and benefit others, should we find them to be partial or universal? Of course we should say they are universal. Now, since universal love is the cause of the major benefits of the world, therefore Motse proclaims universal love to be right.²⁹⁷

This doctrine has been conceived, in modern as well as in ancient times, to strike at the very roots of Sinism and the teachings of Confucius. In this connection, four questions are pertinent con-

²⁹⁷ Mei, *op. cit.*, (pt. 2) p. 96.

cerning the doctrine of "universal love": (1) Does it remove the sanction of "the will of Heaven"? (2) Does it undermine filial piety? (3) Does it weaken the political system by doing away with any special loyalty to one's rulers? (4) Does it condemn the punishment of criminals and evil-doers generally? If it can be shown that the doctrine, as interpreted by Mo Tse, did none of these things, it can hardly be held that the teaching was a menace to Sinism.

(1) "The will of Heaven" was specifically invoked as *the* sanction above all others for the doctrine of universal love.²⁹⁸

(2) It did not undermine filial piety, Mo Tse held, since it prescribed, not less love for one's parents, but only more love toward other people, and was in the end designed directly to benefit one's parents, by bettering the condition of the world.

(3) The practice of universal love, as prescribed by Mo Tse, could not interfere with the government, because of the other central tenet of Moism, that of "identification with the superior."

All you people of the district shall identify yourselves with the lord of the state, and shall not unite with the subordinates. What the lord thinks to be right, all shall think to be right; what he thinks to be wrong, all shall think to be wrong. . . . For the lord of the state is naturally the (most) virtuous of the state. If all the people in the state follow the example of their lord, then how can the state be in disorder?²⁹⁹

Righteousness is the standard. A standard is not to be given by the subordinates to the superior, but by the superior to the subordinates. Therefore, while the common people should spare no pains at work, they may not make the standard at will. . . . The emperor may not make the standard at will (either). There is Heaven to give him the standard. . . . The emperor gives the standard to the High Duke, to the feudal lords, to the scholars, and (through these intermediaries) to the common people.³⁰⁰

As a safeguard against incompetent officials, the moral sense of the people is trusted to cause them to refuse to identify their will with that of such persons.

All of this is very regular, Confucian, and Sinistic.

(4) We are at the heart of the testing of the Moist doctrine of

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 167.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 66.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* (pt.2) pp. 148-49.

“universal love” when we ask if its author advocated that it be carried to the point of condoning crime, or at least allowing it to go unpunished, because one must love even the criminal. To state the question generally, did Mo Tse intend, by his principle, merely to emphasize the need for an attitude of mutual cooperation within society, or was he espousing a soft sentimentalism which he would carry to the point of sacrificing the good of humanity in order to keep from harming a single human being?

It will be recalled that Confucius defined benevolence, on one occasion, as “to love men.” Confucius was an outstanding preacher of cooperation, kindness, and altruism. Yet this did not prevent him from advocating punishment when justice, and the good of society, seemed to require it. The position of Mo Tse is difficult to distinguish, here, from that of Confucius, unless one concern himself with very nice shades of emphasis indeed.

Mo Tse was greatly concerned with the problem of war, as has been noted. The arguments he used against it were the good Confucian ones, that aggression did not accord with the laws of Heaven, and brought destruction in its wake for the aggressor. However, Mo Tse advocated defensive war, and is said to have trained his scholars in the art of defensive warfare. There is a strong tradition that he was himself an engineer of some accomplishment.³⁰¹

Mo Tse was such an opponent of offensive war that he is said to have made long journeys to try to dissuade rulers, whom he had heard were contemplating war, from carrying out their attacks. Yet he, like Confucius and Mencius, differentiated between just and unjust wars. Campaigns which were made in accordance with right and with the will of Heaven were not, he declared, to be called “attacks,” but “punishment,” and these he approved.^{301a}

This is certainly sufficient to show that Mo Tse was not a mere sentimentalist, but held the application of universal love and mutual help within the boundaries of definite standards of conduct.

It is evident, then, that Mo Tse's doctrine of “universal love” was not calculated to remove the sanction of the will of Heaven, to undermine filial piety, to weaken the political system of graded authority, nor to make the enforcement of standards of conduct impossible by prohibiting punishments. It is true enough that Mo Tse did utter a heresy, from the standpoint of Confucius' teachings,

³⁰¹ Wieger, *Histoire des Croyances*, p. 209.

^{301a} Mei, *op. cit.*, (pt. 2) p. 121.

when he said that men should love the parents of others as well as they loved their own parents. But this, important as it may have been, can hardly be considered a difference of opinion on a point fundamental to philosophy. On the contrary, the motive lying back of it, which was the desire to promote social cooperation and to reduce friction and war within the Chinese world, was decidedly a Confucian motive.

It has been shown that Mo Tse may not properly be said to have differed radically from Confucius, in his philosophy, on the basis of the Moist doctrine of "universal love."

Again, the so-called "pragmatism" of Mo Tse, his emphasis on the "usefulness" of things, may be made to seem very different from Confucius' own standard of ethics. When Mo Tse was asked whether his principle of "universal love," although it might be a good thing, could be of any use, he replied, "If it were not useful, then even I would disapprove of it."³⁰² On another occasion, Mo asked a member of the Confucian school why the Confucians studied music. The Confucian replied, "Music is pursued for music's sake." Mo Tse proceeded to ridicule him.³⁰³ It is worthwhile to dwell on the incident, since one writer has declared that it makes clear Mo Tse's "departure from the Confucian approach." Such a statement is typical of the carelessness with which some scholars have interpreted Confucius. The fact is that the "Confucianist" mentioned had learned his lessons very poorly. Confucius was very explicit in holding that the study of music had a positive, normative value, as well as a definite usefulness in ceremonial.

It is by the *Odes* that the mind is aroused.

It is by *li* that the character is established.

It is from Music that the finish is received.³⁰⁴

The Master said, "If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with *li*? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?"³⁰⁵

Further citations, of similar purport, might be made from Confucius, and even from Mencius.³⁰⁶ For Confucius, as for Mo Tse,

³⁰² *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 97.

³⁰³ *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 258.

³⁰⁴ *An.* 8,8.

³⁰⁵ *An.* 3,3.

³⁰⁶ *An.* 17,4; 17,11. *Men.* 1(2),1; 4(1),27.

the ultimate value of any practice is that it contributes to the welfare of human beings.

It must be remembered that, for all of the genuinely Sinist philosophers, the cosmic order was naturally oriented to harmonize with a flourishing human society. We are not surprised, therefore, when Mo Tse asks, "But how can there be anything that is good but not useful?" For all of these men, the ultimate measure of value is the capacity to contribute to human welfare.

The formula for Mo Tse's pragmatism ran somewhat as follows: The doctrines and practices of the ancient sage-kings were a perfect expression of the will of Heaven. The will of Heaven is that the people shall be peaceful, prosperous, and happy. *Therefore*, if (as is often the case) the doctrines and practices of the ancient sage-kings are in some doubt, it is only necessary to find out what will make the people peaceful, prosperous, and happy, in order to recover the ways of the ancient sage-kings in their pristine purity.

But there is never any doubt that Mo Tse is a confirmed traditionalist. Doctrines "should be based on the deeds of the ancient sage-kings."³⁰⁷ His faith in the absolute perfection of the ways of those kings who had been approved by Sinist history is well shown in the following passage:

Mo Tse said: "Any word, any action, that is beneficial to Heaven, the spirits, and the people, is to be carried out. Any word, any action, that is harmful to Heaven, the spirits, and the people, is to be abandoned. Any word, any action, that is in harmony with the (ways of the) sage-kings of the three dynasties, Yao, Shun, Yü, T'ang, Wên, and Wu, is to be carried out. Any word, any action, that is in agreement with the wicked kings of the three dynasties . . . is to be abandoned."³⁰⁸

Time after time, Mo Tse appeals to tradition for support of his contentions. The citations which he thus makes have provided no unimportant source for criticism of some of the older historical documents.

But it would be a mistake to give the impression that Mo appeals to precisely the same traditions to which Confucius and his followers had recourse. There were certain practices, such as the three years of mourning, in support of which the Confucianists could cite perfectly good tradition, but which Mo Tse could not approve, since

³⁰⁷ Mei, *op. cit.* (pt.2) p. 200.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 244.

he believed that their strict application would result in great harm to society.³⁰⁹ He used the well-known method of "appealing from antiquity, to antiquity more remote." As he told Kung Meng Tse, a Confucianist, "you are following only Chow and not Hsia. Your antiquity does not go back far enough."³¹⁰ The practical conclusions which Mo drew from his appeal to antiquity were in some cases very different from the practices approved by Confucius and the Confucians, and these differences are sufficient to account for the bitter enmity between the two factions. But the underlying philosophy (in which we are primarily interested) was the same. The mere fact that Mo Tse selected his traditions does not differentiate him, for Confucius and Mencius did the same thing, and admitted that they did.³¹¹

The fundamental philosophy of Mo Tse is Sinism, simple, pure, and unmixed. He believes, with an unquenchable faith, in the basic goodness of the cosmos, and in the existence of a natural tendency which is always working to reinstate, for man, that good life in a good world which was the ancient and the natural state. Government was established by Heaven, for the benefit of the people. To lead them, Heaven chose the most virtuous man in the empire to be emperor. The rulers are, therefore, the recipients of a sacred trust, which they can not forsake with impunity.³¹² Likewise, the minor rulers and their fiefs were ordained by Heaven, and those who use force to steal the latter are destroying the harmony of the world and making prosperity impossible.³¹³ With Confucius, Mo Tse holds that the most effective way to restore order and felicity is to exalt the virtuous men of the empire, and to place them in office, so that they may direct the government.

This discussion of Mo Tse could not be closed more fittingly than by a statement of his own, in which he sums up his Sinistic faith, simply and unequivocally:

He who obeys the will of Heaven, loving universally and benefitting others, will obtain rewards. He who opposes the will of Heaven, by being partial and unfriendly and harming others, will incur punishment.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.* (pt.2) pp. 135-41. Mo Tse makes out a convincing case here against the mourning regulations approved by Confucius.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* (pt.2) p. 254.

³¹¹ *An.* 9,3; 15,10. *Men.* 7(2),3.

³¹² Mei, *op. cit.* (pt.2) p. 77. Wiegier, *Histoire des Croyances*, p. 210.

³¹³ Wiegier, *Histoire des Croyances*, p. 211.

³¹⁴ Mei, *op. cit.* (pt.2) p. 149.