

On the Argument for *Jian'ai*

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Abstract In all three versions of the “Jian’ai” 兼愛 Chapter in the *Mozi* 墨子, variations of a central argument may be found. This argument proceeds by advancing a diagnosis for what causes the various evils that beset the world, and it is on this basis that the Mohists propose *jian'ai* as the solution. The study examines this main argument in some detail, with the aim of improving both our understanding of the Mohist ethical doctrine and also our appreciation of their argumentative practices. The study shows that distinct ethical injunctions of varying degrees of stringency can be derived from the argument, though they all embody an underlying notion of *impartiality*. This impartiality—while in many ways recognizably attractive to us—puts Mohist *jian'ai* in tension with certain notions regarding the ethical significance of special relations. In addition, the paper argues that the Mohists main argument for *jian'ai* contains a critical flaw.

Keywords Mozi · Mohism · Impartial care · Impartiality

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The doctrine of *jian'ai* 兼愛—variously rendered “universal love” (Mei 1929; Watson 1963 and Johnston 2010), “concern for everyone” (Graham 1985), “inclusive care” (Fraser 2012; Defoort 2005/6) and “impartial caring” (Van Norden 2007; and Ivanhoe 2001)—is considered by many students of ancient Mohism to be central to the ethical thinking expounded in the *Mozi* “Core Chapters.”¹ This seems right as far as it goes. Consider: all three versions of the “Jian’ai” Chapters (*Mozi* 14–16) depict the problem

¹That is, Chapters 8–37 of the received *Mozi* text (see e.g., Graham 1985). On the centrality of *jian'ai*, see e.g., Liang 1975: 15; Hsiao 1979: 225–226; and Graham 1989: 41. This judgment can be traced back to as early as Mencius, the great doctrinal opponent of the Mohists, who singles out “Mo’s *jian'ai*” as a deadly and pernicious teaching that he is intent to oppose (*Mencius* 3B9). Liang sees *jian'ai* as so fundamental to Mohist doctrine that all of the other ethical proposals in the *Mozi* are but elaborations of it. For useful overviews of Mozi, the Mohist school, and the nature of the corpus, see e.g., Johnston 2010, Fraser 2012 and Knoblock and Riegel 2013.

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they intend to resolve as nothing less than all that they perceive to be seriously wrong with their world. This implies that *jian'ai* is supposed to be a panacea for the world's problems. Furthermore, the “Tianzhi 天志” Chapters (*Mozi* 26–28) argue that in accordance with Heaven's intent is the criterion of moral conduct. There may be some uncertainty as to how such a claim is to be squared with the recurrent assumption throughout much of the “Core Chapters”—that the morality of a practice is tied to its producing benefit to the world. Nonetheless, when describing conduct that is in accordance with Heaven's intent, “Tianzhi” says that it is to *jianxiang'ai jiaoxiangli* 兼相愛交相利 (*Mozi* 26.4), “follow and serve *jian* 兼” (*Mozi* 27.8), or “take *jian* as the way” (*Mozi* 28.9).² These also suggest that *jian'ai* identifies a highly central part of the Mohist *dao* 道. With the above in mind, it is unsurprising that the “Jian'ai” Chapters should be among the most closely argued and philosophically rich portions of the *Mozi*. An extended examination of the arguments in these chapters thus provides the ideal opportunity not only to better understand Mohist ethical doctrine, but also to improve our appreciation of their argumentative practices.

When we turn to the chapters themselves, it is readily noticed that all three versions of “Jian'ai” begin with what seems to be variations of one basic main argument. This argument takes up the whole of Version A (*Mozi* 14) and the first parts of Versions B (*Mozi* 15) and C (*Mozi* 16). All three iterations proceed first by identifying what I will call the evils that beset the world and providing a diagnosis for the underlying cause. It is on the basis of this diagnosis that the Mohists propose *jian'ai* as the solution. The aim in this study is to examine what I have called above the Mohist “main argument” for *jian'ai*—to make explicit its logical structure so as to render it intelligible as an *argument*, and to arrive at an appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses as an argument on its own terms.

“Jian'ai” B and C contain, in addition to this main argument, various reported objections, the Mohist responses to them, and what looks to be fresh arguments on behalf of the doctrine ostensibly presented as replies to objections. These additional arguments in “Jian'ai” B and C will not be discussed as they deserve a separate treatment, and in any case, what we make of them will depend on how we understand the initial case the Mohists make for their doctrine. For instance, it remains a matter of discovery whether the Mohists modified their initial position when dealing with objections, and we cannot make a good judgment about that if we do not have a firm grip of the baseline given by the main argument.³ Similarly, the study will also not attempt to present an overall account of the *jian'ai* doctrine itself; rather, it only aims to contribute one piece to that overall puzzle by focusing on what I have called the main argument.

The plan of the study will follow the steps of the main argument itself as these are traced in each of the three versions of “Jian'ai”. A first order of business will be to identify what, according to the Mohist account, are the evils that beset the world and examine the diagnosis provided as to their underlying cause (Section 2). While the text does not make

² Citations from the *Mozi* will be by chapter and paragraph number in Johnston 2010. The translations, however, are my own.

³ Bryan Van Norden's treatment of the arguments in “Jian'ai” in *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*—very much an inspiration for this study—unfortunately omits discussion of what I have called the main argument, and focuses on these other arguments (see also Li Chenyang's 李晨陽 review of the book in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*). Dan Robins's recent paper “Mohist Care” includes a discussion of what I have called the main argument (he calls it the “core argument”) and for the most part, the account advanced here is consistent with it, though Robins is ultimately more sanguine regarding the flaw in the Mohist argument that this paper identifies (Robins 2012).

the distinction explicit, two distinct groups of such evils can be discerned in the text. One group concerns how people who are related to each other in a special relationship fail to treat each other properly as befitting the understood terms of that relationship. Another involves the more general phenomenon of destructive conflict and exploitation of the weak. The mirror image of the cause of these evils is *jian'ai*, which is presented as an exact opposite or reversal of the causes of these evils. The Mohist promise is that if only people were to conduct themselves according to it, the evils that beset the world would be eliminated and great benefits promoted. Distinct ethical injunctions of varying degrees of stringency can be derived from the text, and an escalation of ethical demand across the versions (from A to B to C) can also be observed (Section 3). Nonetheless, the distinct injunctions all embody an underlying notion of *impartiality*. This impartiality—while in many ways recognizably attractive to us—puts Mohist *jian'ai* in tension with certain notions regarding the ethical significance of special relations (Section 4). To anticipate, the paper will argue that the Mohist main argument for *jian'ai* contains a critical flaw if it is meant to be addressed to both groups of evils identified above.

Before proceeding to the main study itself, there is one more thing to discuss. I use the phrase “*jian'ai*” to refer to the proposal—whatever its content—enjoined by the Mohist main argument. But what does the phrase even mean? The following are my assumptions about the terms. The term *ai* 愛 in early texts take a sense that range from “to love,” to “have concerned for,” to “to care for,” even “to be sparing with” (see Wang 1993: 827–828). Within the Mozi, *ai* is closely associated with *li* 利 (to benefit); the two terms are sometimes conjoined (*ai li* 愛利; e.g., in Mozi 13.5–7 and 16.13 passim). In “Tianzhi,” the notion that Heaven *ai* the world is also explained in terms of how it benefits the world (Mozi 26.4, 27.6). The overall impression is that to *ai* something goes hand in hand with seeking to benefit it in the “Core Chapters,” or at least having the disposition to do so. Given these connections I take “A *ai* X” to mean something like “A is concerned to promote what benefits X.”⁴ Though as we shall see later, not everything that might conceivably “benefit” someone is under the purview of the Mohist ethical concern both in general, and in *jian'ai* in particular. But in order to avoid prolixity, I will use “A cares for X” to stand in for “A *ai* X”.

One basic sense of *jian* 兼 (as a verb) in early texts is “to combine or unite,” a sense that overlaps with the meaning of the term *bing* 并 (see Wang 1993: 567). Sometimes, the combination referred to by the two terms is carried out by violent means: “to conquer” (e.g., to bring about the combining of territories through military action), especially when the two are used in conjunction (*jian* in Mozi 19.3, and *bingjian* in Mozi 19.1 and 25.8, *jianbing* in Mozi 28.12). The recurring antonym of (the verb) *jian* in the “Core Chapters” is *bie* 別: “to separate, divide,” in particular, to separate out a part from a whole or to divide a whole into parts, and by extension “to distinguish,” or to “discriminate” (Wang 1993: 472, 584). In the phrase *jian'ai*, however, *jian* is adverbial upon the verbal *ai*—presumably, to *ai* in a *jian* manner. Given the implied opposition between *jian* and *bie*, I will use “inclusively care for [the people of the world]” to stand in for the phrase “*jian'ai*,” as a matter of convenience. By analogy, *jianxiang'ai* 兼相愛 becomes “inclusively care for each other.” The caveat is that what exactly an “inclusive” manner of caring actually enjoins people to do remains to be discovered.

It is important to keep in mind that “*jian'ai*” as an independent phrase only appears as the title traditionally ascribed to Mozi 14–16 and nowhere else within the “Core

⁴ Angus C. Graham says: “the Mohist *ai* is an unemotional will to benefit people and dislike of harming them” (Graham 1989: 41). For a defense of “love” as a translation of *ai*, see Knoblock and Riegel 2013: 139.

Chapters.”⁵ In fact, with the exception of *jianxiang'ai* (*Mozi* 14.17) and the longer variant *jianxiang'ai jiaoxiangli* 兼相愛交相利 (*Mozi* 15.11, 16.48, 26.22), constructions in which *jian* either qualifies or is coordinated with another verb do not even appear within the Mohists main argument in the “Jian'ai” Chapters.

There remain a number of passages in which the use of the term *jian* and *bie* seem best taken as distinctive Mohist terms of art. This includes a handful of occurrences in the objections and replies in “Jian'ai” B (e.g., *Mozi* 15.9), most of the instances in “Jian'ai” C, and a few in “Tianzhi” B and C (*Mozi* 27.8–9, 28.8).⁶ The overall impression is that the term in these passages refers to the way (*dao* 道; *Mozi* 28.35) of conduct enjoined by the *jian'ai* doctrine. In a few instances, *jian* can also be a verb meaning to put into practice such a *dao* (*Mozi* 15.4, 15.8), or qualifying an agent who conducts himself in accordance with that way (e.g., the *jianshi* 兼士 in *Mozi* 16.5 and *jianjun* 兼君 in *Mozi* 16.7).⁷ Analogously, *bie* in like contexts denotes a way of conduct opposed to the *jian* way of conduct (e.g., *Mozi* 16.1). Henceforth, I will always use “JIAN” and “BIE” to refer to the two opposed *dao*.

2

As mentioned earlier, all versions of “Jian'ai” begin with what seem to be variations of one basic main argument. This is not to say that there are not interesting and important differences between them (see Defoort 2005/6). Rather, the point is only that despite those differences, sufficient overlap exists such that it seems best to see them as *variations* of one basic argument, or at the very least, three closely related arguments sharing a common structure. One interesting thing about this basic main argument is how it departs from the way one might have expected the Mohists to go about arguing for a proposal that is, after all, to be justified by the promise of producing good consequences for the world. Instead of considering the consequences that would result if people were to adopt *jian'ai* and weighing them against the consequences that would result if people were to adopt the opposite—the procedure suggested by the “Jieyang” 節葬 Chapter (see *Mozi* 25.3). These chapters begin with the bad situation, propose a diagnosis for its cause, and on *that* basis, propose the solution in the form of *jian'ai*,

⁵ The titles may be added by later editors, possibly the father and son team LIU Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and LIU Xin 劉歆 (46BCE–CE 23), who assembled a complete text of the *Mozi* for the Han 漢 Imperial Library (see Graham 1985: 17).

⁶ As *dao*, this *jian* is something that one can “affirm” (*shi* 是), “condemn” (*fei* 非; *Mozi* 16.3), or “practice” (*xing* 行; *Mozi* 15.8), and the cause of which one can “follow and serve” (*congshi* 從事; *Mozi* 27.8). There could also be a verbally articulated counterpart of this *dao*, that is a “discourse” or “doctrine” (*yan* 言; see *Mozi* 16.6), which one can “hold to” (*zhi* 執; *ibid.*) and on the basis of which conduct oneself in a certain manner. In these respects, *jian* is exactly parallel to the doctrines (*yan* 言) of “the man who holds to [the doctrine enjoining] elaborate funerals and prolonged mourning” (*Mozi* 25.11), or “the man who holds to [the doctrine saying] the non-existence of spirits” (*Mozi* 31.2) or “the man who holds to [the doctrine affirming] the existence of fate” (*Mozi* 35.2).

⁷ Rather than, as Harbsmeier has it (Harbsmeier 1981: 54), a reverbalization or nominalization of the grammaticalized use of the (verbal) *jian*. However, he might not disagree. Consider his translations of two key passages cited. (1) *nai ruo jian ze shan yi* 乃若兼則善矣: “If he is universal, he is good” (*Mozi* 15.4); and (2) *gu jian zhe sheng wang zhi dao ye* 故兼者聖王之道也 “Universalism thus is the way of the Sage King” (*Mozi* 16.15; emphasis mine). Both “is universal” (or perhaps better: “practices universalism”) and “universalism” appear to assume a backdrop of Mohist technical usage by reference to which exactly what each involves is given content and without which neither would make much sense.

presented as the reversal of the cause of the evils. Version A even explains the need for such a procedure: it says that in order for a sage ruler to bring about order in the world, “he must know that from which disorder arises”—just as a physician can only treat his patient if he knows the cause of the illness (*Mozi* 14.1). While Versions B and C do not say anything analogous, the flow of argument in both suggests that similar thoughts are being presupposed. An interpretation of the Mohist main arguments which makes sense of the *jian'ai* proposal as derived from their diagnosis of the problem is thus preferred.⁸

Something else to keep in mind is the fact that the Mohist arguments were probably mainly addressed to the social and political elite. “*Jian'ai*” A presents its proposals as if meant for someone who aspires to be a sage ruler of the world (*Mozi* 14.1). “*Jian'ai*” B and C begin less ambitiously by discussing how “the good person” (*ren ren* 仁人) (*Mozi* 15.1, 16.1) would conduct his affairs, but both chapters end by appealing explicitly to the political elite, and speak of what they propose as “the way for ordering the world” (*Mozi* 15.10) and “the way of the sage kings” (*Mozi* 16.15). This suggests that the “good person” the Mohists have in mind is really the “good ruler.” As we shall see later, some otherwise puzzling features of the Mohist argument become less puzzling when we keep in mind that the intended audience is not a generic public, but the social and political elite.

But let's begin with the statement of the problem to be solved. At the outset, there is a terminological difference between Version A, on the one hand, and Versions B and C, on the other. In the former, the problem is “the disorder of the world” (*tianxia zhi luan* 天下之亂) (*Mozi* 14.1), while specific elements that contribute to it are “the disorderly things/affairs of the world” (*tianxia zhi luanwu* 天下之亂物), or just different things that are “said to be disorder” (*suowei luan ye* 所謂亂也) (*Mozi* 14.2). In the latter two, the problem concerns “the harms to the world” (*tianxia zhi hai* 天下之害) (*Mozi* 15.1, 16.1), sometimes, “the greatest harms to the world” (*tianxia zhi da hai* 天下之大害) (*Mozi* 16.1). Nonetheless, the versions are each concerned with certain patterns of undesirable human behavior, listing the same or very similar specifics even if not always in the same order. These patterns of behavior are presented as uncontroversially problematic, and as representative of the chief problems of the world. This implies that any convincing solution to them will possess a measure of cogency as injunctions to action just in virtue of the addressee's acknowledgement that these are indeed serious evils that need to be eliminated. For the purposes of the following discussion, I will refer to these patterns of undesirable human behavior collectively as “the evils that beset the world.”

Concerning the evils themselves, two distinct groups can be discerned, though the text does not mark any such distinction between them. The first group is exemplified by rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, older and younger brothers treating each other in a problematic manner (*Mozi* 14.2, 15.1, 16.1). The problem is characterized in terms of people not conducting themselves according to what is (conventionally considered) proper given the special relationship they share on account of their respective roles and positions. To give one example: fathers should be kind (*ci* 慈) to sons and sons should be filial (*xiao* 孝) to fathers, but both fail to conduct themselves so.

The second group is exemplified by destructive conflicts between states, (noble) houses and individuals, and plain thievery and robbery (*Mozi* 14.2, 15.2). Here, Version

⁸ Compare Robins, who, while rightly pointing out that the argument is “consequentialist” in form, does not focus on the Mohists advertised procedure in the chapters to begin with the diagnosis of the problem (Robins 2012: 62).

C seems to have something more specific in mind: it speaks of more powerful groups and individuals bullying their weaker counterparts (*Mozi* 16.1; cf. 26.7, 27.4, 28.8, 32.5). However, it is doubtful that the writer of Version C thinks that an ostensibly weaker state committing military aggression against an otherwise stronger state does not count as a proper “harm to the world.” In all likelihood, the wording in Version C reflects a realistic recognition that it is the groups and individuals who are more powerful that tend to initiate the various sorts of conflict that constitute harm to the world. This thought is also implied in Version B (*Mozi* 15.2).

Again, keep in mind that the distinction between the two groups is not marked in the text. As far as the explicit presentation goes, they are all evils that beset the world. But taken at face value, the evils in the first group concern people’s bad conduct towards those who are in a special relationship with them or, alternatively, toward those who are in the same “in-group.” What seems naturally required for a successful solution to the evils in the first group is that people are restored to those special relationships that have been violated by their behavior, for example, by fathers being kind to sons and sons being filial to fathers. The evils in the second group, in contrast, do not presuppose the prior existence of such special relationships but could, in principle, be perpetuated against people in general, whether or not they are from the same “in-group” or share a special relationship with the agent. While there can be no issue of X being or failing to be filial to Y unless X and Y are in a father-son relationship, X can be in armed conflict with, rob, or bully Y, whether or not they are in a special relationship. To anticipate, the Mohist disregard of the distinction I have in mind will cause a problem for their argument (Section 4).

Having identified the problem to be resolved, let us now turn to the Mohist diagnosis of its cause. Since the divergence is now between Versions A and B on the one hand, and Version C on the other, I will focus on the former two first, though, as we shall see shortly, the diagnosis in Version C can be assimilated to them. Versions A and B say that the various evils that beset the world came about on account of “(people) not caring for each other” (*bu-xiang’ai* 不相愛) (*Mozi* 14.2, 15.2). Here, two recurring patterns emerge from their elaboration of how such a thing caused the different evils that beset the world. The first pattern involves pairs of individuals, each member of which cares for himself and does not care for the other. The relevant pairs include: ruler and minister, father and son, elder and younger brother. The upshot in each case is that the members of each pair harm the other so as to benefit himself (Version A), or have no qualms about doing so (Version B). A second pattern involves individuals who are members of groups (e.g., family, country) caring for their own groups and not caring for other groups. Examples include robbers and thieves and their families, leaders of noble houses and their kin, princes and their states.⁹ Again, the outcome is supposed to be that they harm other groups so as to benefit their own groups (Version A), or have no qualms mobilizing their associates to do so (Version B). In other words, “Jian’ai” A and B’s diagnosis of the problem is that it is a *mutual* lack of care that led to *reciprocal* harming among people.

While the text does not say that everyone in the world is in mutually uncaring relationships, the generality of the way in which it discusses the matter and the fact that it is ostensibly discussing the evils that beset *the world* suggest that the problem is supposed to be

⁹ It is noteworthy that a large part of the account in both A and B is taken up by the repetitious listing of the instances of such evils. It is as if the writers want to drum home the point that there is a common pattern of behavior—captured by (1) and (3)—that is the cause of the evils that beset the world.

endemic. This raises the puzzle posed by the stark situation of people who ostensibly stand in various special relationships to each other (e.g., fathers and sons) and yet literally do not care for each other. Could this really be a widespread phenomenon, even in the turbulent times of Warring States China? Some hyperbole is probably involved. Nonetheless, a slightly different way to understand what the Mohists might have in mind is suggested by passages from elsewhere in the *Mozi*. In “Gengzhu 耕柱,” the critic Wumazi 巫馬子 is made to tell Mozi that he is unable to *jian'ai*: “I care for the people of Zou 鄒 more so than for the people of Yue 越, the people of Lu more so than the people of Zou, the people of my district more so than the people of Lu 魯, members of my family more so than people of my district, my parents more so than other members of my family, myself more so than my parents” (*Mozi* 46.18). (Presumably Wumazi is an inhabitant of Lu; Zou is a neighboring state, while Yue is a more distant state.) The issue with people like Wumazi is not that they simply do not care about other people or groups other than the ones they belong to; rather, they care more for themselves over others, their own groups over other groups, or generally speaking, more closely related people over less closely related people. Unlike the situation of people simply not caring for each other at all, Wumazi’s condition is plausibly a much more common one. Nonetheless, it is probably best to take the Mohist observation as what social scientists might call a “stylized view of the facts” or a “stylized fact,” a simplified version of a complicated empirical finding that is good enough for the Mohists’ purposes, namely of providing a general diagnosis for the evils that beset the world.

So we have two possible diagnoses of the cause of the evils that beset the world: a mutual *lack* of care, and a mutual *disparity* of care. It is hard to be certain but the second construal could have been intended by the Mohists. Circumstantial evidence comes from the report in the *Mencius*, that the Mohists stand for “caring without gradations” (*ai wu cha deng* 愛無差等) (*Mencius* 3A5), meant to be contrastive with the Confucian emphasis on graded care. Furthermore, mutual *lack* of care is actually a special case of the mutual *disparity* of care: this is the case where one cares *less* for X compared to Y in the sense that one cares *not* for X at all. In any case, the Mohist argument seems to work on the alternative construal. With this in mind, I will assume the second construal in my exposition.

To summarize, the account in Versions A and B so far can be formulated as follows. First, the Mohists make a general observation about the world:

- (1) people care more for themselves than they do each other, their own groups than each other’s groups.

The repeated claim is that instances of the above give rise to

- (2) people harm each other so as to benefit themselves, each other’s groups so as to benefit their own groups (as they interact with each other).

Or they have no qualms about doing so. But how exactly is the above to be understood? In particular, in what sense is the above meant to be a diagnosis of what causes the evils that beset the world?

To see the logic of what the Mohists are saying, consider first that they take “people harm each other so as to benefit their own” as a general category under which “all the disorderly things in the world” (*Mozi* 14.2) or “all the calamities, expropriations, enmity, and hatred” (*Mozi* 15.2) fall (see *Mozi* 16.1). In other words, the different forms of problematic behavior that constitute the evils that beset the world are all supposed to be exemplifications of this one general pattern of behavior. One way to think of what the

Mohists are doing is to see them as proposing a *simplifying model* of the evils that beset the world. Their account thus abstracts from the multifarious particulars of each type of evil only those features that identify them to the Mohist as instances of evils that beset the world, and in such a way as to make them amenable under a unified causal narrative. To anticipate, as we shall discuss later, this simplifying model fits much better with the (previously discussed) second group of the evils that beset the world than the first (Section 4).

But how does (1) (people care more for themselves than they do each other, their own groups than they do each other's groups) provide a *causal explanation* for (2) (people harm each other so as to benefit themselves, each other's groups so as to benefit their own groups)? Two clues are suggested by the text. First, the Mohists present instances of (1) as regularly leading to (2). In fact, a large part of the account in both Versions A and B consists in given repetitious examples of this connection. Is this a plausible claim on their part? To see how instances of (1) *might* regularly lead to (2), we have to first assume the background of a scarcity of resources relative to people's desires, and the possibility of conflict of interests so that circumstances exist in which individuals and groups actually stand to benefit their own *at* the expense of others *by* harming them, as they come into interaction with each other—in other words, the real world. Now add to this mix the existence of inequalities of ability (both real and perceived) between people, since people act to harm others so as to benefit their own usually only when they are, or believe that they are, in a position of strength, or that they can get away with doing so. This second assumption not only connects with the descriptions of the evils in Versions B and C in terms of more powerful individuals or groups bullying the weaker, but also speaks to the fact that the Mohists' arguments were addressed to the social and political elite. In other words, they were addressed primarily at the very people able to benefit themselves or their groups by harming others. Once the two assumptions are taken into account, the Mohist suggestion that (1) regularly lead to (2) becomes a more plausible one, at least as a proposed simplifying account of how the social and political elite of Warring States China behaved.

There is also a second connection in the reverse direction suggested by the way the Mohists argued for their solution. As we shall see in more detail later, the consistent move in each version is: do something about the cause of the problem—make it such that (1) does not obtain, that is, by acting in accordance with *jian'ai*. The thought is thus: were (1) not so, (2) would not be so. The two connections—instances of (1) lead regularly to (2), given appropriate background assumptions, and were (1) not so, (2) would not be so—together provide a way for us to make sense of the Mohists' claim that the evils that beset the world are *caused* by people caring more for their own than others. The first connection suggests an analysis of causation in terms of the regular conjunction of like occurrences. The second connection suggests a counterfactual analysis of causation. If the Mohists did think that the two are jointly implied by a causal connection, they would be assuming an analysis of causation close to the one that David Hume proposed when he says: "We may define a cause to be an object followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second. Or, in other words, where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed" (Hume 1975: Sect. VII, Pt. II). (Hume, though, seems to have conflated the two sorts of connection, mistakenly thinking that the latter is just another way of saying the former [see Mackie 1974: 30].) In any case, it is the second, counterfactual connection that will be needed for the Mohists' argument for their solution to work.

In contrast with A and B, the presentation in C is much more schematic. The language also suggests that the version is composed for an audience assumed to be more familiar with Mohist terminology and hence likely later in time than A and B (see Defoort 2005/6). Nonetheless, the account in C fits the general pattern laid down in the other versions.

Are they engendered by [people] caring for and benefitting other people? The answer must be: “not so!” [The answer] must be that they are engendered by [people] abhorring and destroying other people. If we are to categorize [such behavior as] abhorring and destroying other people that occur in the world, would they be [under] JIAN or BIE? The answer must be: “JIAN.” If so isn’t it [the behavior of people] interacting with each other from BIE that really engenders the greatest harms to the world? This is why BIE is to be condemned. (*Mozi* 16.1)

As discussed earlier, in this context, JIAN and BIE refer to two opposed *dao* (Section 1). Though neither is further defined here at the beginning of “Jian’ai” C, they are given a fuller treatment later in the chapter. As part of a “thought experiment” (*Mozi* 16.5–6), the Mohists invite the objecting audience to imagine two men of service (*shi* 士). One “holds to BIE” and the other “holds to JIAN.”¹⁰ The first is presented as asking rhetorically how he could possibly regard another person the way he regards himself, or another person’s parents the way he regards his parents—the implied answer being he couldn’t (or wouldn’t). All this is consistent with the notion that someone who holds to BIE is someone who cares more for himself than others, more for associates than strangers. This means that the analysis in “Jian’ai” C concurs with that in A and B; the main added thought is that the cause (as identified by Versions A and B) is either synonymous with or at least the outcome of people conducting themselves according to BIE (in Version C).

3

To recap, the Mohists basically assert, as a stylized fact about the world, that

- (1) people care more for themselves than they do for each other, and more for their own groups than they do for each other’s groups.

Version C adds the notion that the above is either synonymous with, or the outcome of

- (3) people conduct themselves according to BIE.

The regular outcome of the above as people interact given conditions in the real world (relative scarcity, the possibility of conflicting interests, disparity of power) is that

- (2) people harm each other so as to benefit themselves, each other’s groups so as to benefit their own groups (as they interact with each other).

Which is itself a simplifying model of the evils that beset the world. What of the solution? As already mentioned previously (Section 2), the Mohists basically urge that something be done to make it so that the cause of the problem does not obtain. The thought is that were (1)/(3) not to obtain, (2) would not as well, all things being

¹⁰ For a longer discussion of this “Caretaker Argument,” see Van Norden 2007: 180–189 and Robins 2012: 70–73.

equal. This implies that if people wished to eliminate the evils that beset the world—and the audience is counted upon to grant that—then all things being equal, they have a reason to make it so that (1)/(3) does not obtain.

So Version A enjoins that the people of the world “inclusively care for each other” (*Mozi* 14.3). Versions B and C are more explicit about, first, the notion that the proposed way of conduct is meant to be a replacement for (and is thus incompatible with) the old manner of conduct that has been causing the problem; and second, the idea that the replacement consists in the adoption of a certain explicitly formulated way of conduct. Version B says that people are to replace the old manner of conduct by applying the standard (*fa* 法) of “inclusively care for each other, in interactions benefit each other” (*Mozi* 15.2). Version C says that they are to “use JIAN to replace BIE” (*Mozi* 16.2).

The Mohist promise is that if people were to conduct themselves according to *jian'ai*, individuals, families, and states would not be engaged in all that mutual harming. In other words, they are stating how people acting according to *jian'ai* will bring about (or *cause*) the desired outcome. This part of the account mirrors the earlier diagnosis of the cause of the evils besetting the world. We can state their argument thus:

(1') People care for each other as they do themselves, each other's groups as they do their own groups (Opposite of (1)).

Or in the formulation of Version C:

(3') People conduct themselves according to JIAN (Opposite of (3)).

And what follows is supposed to be:

(2') People do not harm each other (as they interact with each other) (Opposite of (2)).

This is the desired outcome emphasized in all versions. (More is promised by Version C but we will come to that shortly.) Assuming that the outcome in (2') is what the audience aims to achieve, the Mohist argument gives them a practical reason to want to bring it about so that, all else being equal, (1')/(3') obtains.

But does it mean that people are to either “regard” or “do,” that is, care for each other's as they do their own? Or what exactly does (1')/(3') enjoin that people *do*? As if anticipating my question, all versions immediately elaborate upon what their proposals involve, and how each will lead to the desired outcome. This elaboration is quite consistent across the versions: both Versions A and B enjoin people to “see” (*shi* 視, i.e., “regard”) other people as they “see” themselves, other families and countries as they do their own families and countries (*Mozi* 14.3, 15.2). Likewise in Version C, the proposal that JIAN replace BIE is explained in terms of people doing unto others as they do themselves, and other groups as they do their own groups, with the explanation that such is what is meant by “people caring for and benefitting other people” (*Mozi* 16.2). This thought is also reiterated in the later thought experiment where the man of service who holds to JIAN says that he treats others as he does himself, other people's parents as he does his own parents (*Mozi* 16.5–6). Presumably the point is that people in some sense *care* for each other as they do themselves and other groups as they do their own groups, and seek to benefit each other in some related way.

But the text here still points in several different directions. One dominant reading of what is involved in *jian'ai* is that people have the concern to benefit others without making distinctions between associates and strangers, self and others. This is the thought behind Van Norden's interpretation of *jian'ai* as requiring that "one should have equal concern for, and has equal ethical obligations toward, promoting the well-being of every person, regardless of any special relation a person might have with oneself" (Van Norden 2007: 179). Let us formulate the maxim of conduct enjoined thus:

BENEFITTING: People are to have a concern to *benefit* each other as much as they do themselves, each other's groups as much as they do their own groups.

Taken at face value, this might be a very stringent, perhaps even overly demanding doctrine. It also conflicts with the widely held intuition that we have a greater obligation to be concerned about the welfare of those who stand in a special relation with us than those without, and those who are more closely related to us than those who are more distantly related. Still, it has the virtue of explaining the fact that "Jian'ai" B and C present objectors as claiming that the *jian'ai* proposal is too difficult to practice (e.g., *Mozi* 15.8, 16.9).

But it is also possible that the Mohists have something more restricted than BENEFITTING in mind. Consider this passage from Version C, which states a beneficial outcome of people adopting *jian'ai* that goes beyond the elimination of the evils that beset the world:

...those with sharp ears and keen eyes will see and hear for others, those with sturdy limbs will work for others, and those who know the Way will endeavor to teach others; those who are old and without wives or children will find means of support and be able to live out their days; the young, weak and orphaned who have no parents will have people upon whom they can depend and who will bring them up. (*Mozi* 16.4)

Recall also the thought experiment argument (*Mozi* 16.5–6) featuring two men of service, one holding to BIE and the other to JIAN. Apart from the maxims they each hold to, the passage also says that the latter would "feed others if he saw that they were hungry, clothe them if they were cold, nourish them if they were sick, and bury them if they died," while the latter would not care to do so. These above considerations suggest an interpretation of *jian'ai* not so much in terms of a concern to open-endedly *benefit* people or promote their welfare in some general sense, but a concern to *help* people who have some urgent need:

HELPING: People are to have a concern to *help* each other as they do themselves, each other's groups as they do their own groups.

This is a less demanding doctrine than BENEFITTING. HELPING might be implied by BENEFITTING but not the other way round. We can think of HELPING as a more restricted version of BENEFITTING, one that has been qualified by a more limited rather than expansive conception of what counts as the legitimate welfare of other people that is under the purview of *jian'ai*.

A third interpretation is arrived at if we look at it from the point of view of the initial stated aims of the Mohist argument, that is, elimination of the evils that beset the world.

Given the Mohist understanding of what these evil ultimately amount to—people harming each other so as to benefit their own—what is minimally required by the aim of their argument is that people *stop harming* others so as to benefit their own. This is not the same as saying that they are to *benefit* or *help* others. That is, even if the latter two plausibly imply the former, the former does not imply them in turn. This gives us:

→ **NOT HARMING:** People are to *refrain from harming* each other as they do themselves, each other's groups as they do their own groups."

It is entirely possible that the Mohists were unclear regarding the distinction between BENEFITTING, HELPING, and NOT HARMING. In the objections and replies part of Version B, for instance, they cite examples of ancient sage kings who conducted themselves according to *jian'ai*. They mention the flood management activities of Yü 禹 for instance, which seem best taken as an effort to help people suffering from problems caused by perennial flooding (*Mozi* 15.8), suggesting an interpretation of *jian'ai* in terms of either BENEFITTING, or more likely, HELPING. However, they speak in the immediate sequel of King Wen 文王, whose practice of *jian'ai* consists of not bullying the weak as the strong are wont to (*Mozi* 15.9), which suggests an interpretation in terms of NOT HARMING. Nonetheless, to the extent that the three interpretations do not say the same, the question remains as to which among them is (or are) intended by the Mohists. Strictly speaking, a full answer to my question will go beyond the examination of the Mohist main argument for *jian'ai*. What follows is only indicative and meant, in the first instance, as part of my analysis of the main argument rather than to provide a conclusive account of Mohist *jian'ai* in general.

The balance of textual evidence suggests the following tentative conclusions. First, NOT HARMING is a sort of common factor between the three versions of "Jian'ai". As mentioned, it answers directly to the Mohist advertised aim in their main argument to present a solution to eliminate the evils that beset the world, evils that are analyzed in terms of *people harming each other so as to benefit their own*. The most crucial thing, however, is that unlike BENEFITTING and HELPING, NOT HARMING is actually the conclusion directly supported by the main argument as it is presented in all three versions of "Jian'ai." In fact, "Jian'ai" A (the whole of which consists in the presentation of the main argument) can be understood purely in terms of NOT HARMING and without reference to either HELPING or BENEFITTING. Most of the passages that point in the direction of the other two interpretations tend to be from the "objection and replies" of "Jian'ai" B and C. More circumstantially, it is also significant that ideas in the region of NOT HARMING can be found in "Tianzhi," which, as already mentioned (Section 1), explicated conduct in accordance with Heaven's Will in terms of JIAN. When detailing what is involved in JIAN conduct, these chapters consistently speak of the strong not bullying the weak and characterize BIE conduct in exactly the opposite way (*Mozi* 27.8, 27.9, 28.8; see also 26.7).

Second, as already mentioned, elements of BENEFITTING or HELPING can be found in Versions B and C. While the relevant passages are mainly in the objections and replies section of the two chapters and thus outside of the main argument, Version C's elaboration of the good consequences that come from adopting *jian'ai* includes the idea of the better endowed providing for the less well off (*Mozi* 16.4), which means that the ideas relating to BENEFITTING, or more accurately, HELPING, are built into their statement of the main argument in this version. But in general, an interpretation in terms of HELPING rather than BENEFITTING is all that is required by the text. This point also coheres well with other passages in the "Core Chapters," suggesting that the Mohist ethical doctrine tends to

focus primarily on certain objective basic needs that people have rather than “welfare” in some indifferent sense. In “Feiyue 非樂,” for instance, there is the claim that the common people are worried about three things: that when they are hungry they will have no food, when they are cold they will have no clothing, and when they are weary they will have no rest (*Mozi* 32.4). That is, not everything that could conceivably be a “benefit” (e.g., giving the young person from a middle class family a new iPod) is under the scope of what the Mohists consider an ethically relevant sort of benefit, the sort that enters into what they refer to when speaking of the “benefit of the world” (*tianxia zhi li* 天下之利).

In sum, it seems best to see the Mohists considered position as enjoining a combination of NOT HARMING and HELPING (rather than BENEFITTING). An idea in the background probably is that NOT HARMING applies in just about all cases when people interact, but HELPING becomes applicable in conditions of crisis or to people in dire need.¹¹ Unfortunately, the text is hardly explicit; but such a division of labor would seem to be a charitable construal of the Mohist intention. We can also see the shift from Version A (which can be made sense of purely in terms of NOT HARMING), to Version B (which includes elements of HELPING in the objections and replies), to Version C (which appends HELPING directly to the elaboration of the main argument) as an escalation of ethical demands from one version to the next.

Apart from the potential conflation between the three interpretations of what is enjoined by *jian'ai* in the Mohist main argument, additional qualifications are also suggested by other parts of the text which are orthogonal to the distinction between BENEFITTING, HELPING, and NOT HARMING. First, there are indications that what is required of each person varies according to his abilities. Recall the promise in Version C (*Mozi* 16.4) that if people adopt JIAN, “those with sharp ears and clear eyes,” “those with sturdy limbs,” and “those with knowledge of the Way” will help those who are disadvantaged. Those who are able to will come to the aid of “those who are old and without wives or children” and “the young and orphaned who have no parents.” This suggests that what abilities one possesses relative to those of others is a consideration relevant to assessing one’s actual responsibilities. Or take Sage Yü, who mounted a military expedition to punish the bad ruler of the Miao 苗 (*Mozi* 16.10)—rescuing those oppressed by some tyrant by humanitarian military intervention is part of what it could mean for a sage ruler of the world to practice *jian'ai*. Or take King Wen and Wu 武王, part of whose *jian'ai* consists in how they “rewarded the worthy and punished the wicked without showing any favoritism toward their own kin or brothers” (*Mozi* 16.12). Activities of these sorts are presumably not within the power or responsibility of lesser individuals.

Second, the Mohists seem to be primarily concerned that people who have some sort of mutual intercourse—people between whom it might plausibly be the case that they can be either mutually uncaring or caring in their interactions, so that it can be an issue whether they are harming each other, or helping or refraining from harming each other. As the slogan in Version B puts it, the requirement is that people “inclusively care for each other and in interactions benefit each other” (*Mozi* 15.3; emphasis mine). In addition, different spheres of interaction—potentially each with its own specific demands—may be involved. Recall that in spelling out the requirement of *jian'ai*, the Mohists say that people are to regard each other as they do themselves, each other’s families as they do their own families, and each other’s countries as they do their own countries—three distinct spheres of interaction right there. But what counts as normal intercourse between two persons that could either be

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¹¹ I owe this suggestion to an anonymous reviewer.

poisoned by a mutual lack of care or could bring about mutual benefit will depend on, for instance, whether they interact as private individuals within a common social life at one end of the spectrum, or as representatives of larger collectives at the other end.

4

However we understand *jian'ai*—whether in terms of something like BENEFITTING, or as I have urged above, in terms of a combination of HELPING and NOT HARMING and with the additional qualifications—the proposal in the Mohist main argument points toward an underlying notion of impartiality. We can see *jian'ai* as making explicit the notion that the common benefit of the world is, *in some sense*, impartially and equally the benefit of everyone. It is this impartiality that, the Mohists urge, ought to govern people's interactions with each other at the level of individuals, families, and countries. The crucial underlying idea can be stated as follows: the mere fact that someone with whom I am in mutual interaction is not *me* is not a relevant consideration to the question whether or not I have an obligation or the permission to treat him in certain specific ways. As Rev. William Godwin puts it, “What magic is there, in the pronoun ‘my’ to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth?” (Godwin 1926: 42). Insofar as the three alternative formulations—BENEFITTING, HELPING, NOT HARMING—are elaborations of what this basic injunction entails by way of conduct, they present different specifications of what is involved in Mohist impartiality. That is, the idea shared by all three is that I ought to treat strangers, associates, and self as *equals* or *deserving of equal consideration in some crucial respect*. The maxims BENEFITTING, HELPING, and NOT HARMING specify differing content to the “relevant respect” in which a person is to treat people as deserving of equal consideration. By the same token, each is also compatible with different degrees of partiality. For instance, NOT HARMING is entirely compatible with me giving my family members or other people who are related to me by special relationships more than an equal consideration when it comes to whether I should help or benefit them (see also Robins 2012: 64–65).

We can take the specification of moral impartiality in BENEFITTING to be saying: the mere fact that the person is not *me* or *my* associate is not relevant to the question as to whether I am obliged to seek his welfare. In the case of HELPING, that it is not relevant to the question whether I am to help him when he has an urgent need. In both cases, I have a *positive duty* to advance the welfare of other people, though the extent to which I am expected to do so is different (benefitting vs. helping), and though the exact requirements may be further qualified by additional considerations (our comparative abilities, the relevant sphere of interaction). The specification of impartiality in NOT HARMING, on the other hand, says: the mere fact that the person is not *me* or *my* associate is not relevant to the question whether I have permission to *harm* him (i.e., to pursue benefit for my own). This conception presents constraints upon my pursuit or the manner of my pursuit of benefit for one's own. It tells me that I have a *negative duty* not to treat people in a certain way but does not directly imply any positive duty to treat them in a certain way. Either way, however, the *jian* manner of caring for people is, at bottom, an *impartial* way of doing so.

Nothing said above implies that the basic notion of impartiality embodied in the Mohist main argument for *jian'ai* is unique to them—even though the Mohists certainly emphasized and exposed the ideal to a much higher degree than in comparable early Chinese texts. It is possible to see the Confucian doctrine that what one does not desire for oneself, one ought

not to do to others (*Analects* 5.12, 15.24) as embodying an analogous basic notion of impartiality.¹² Nonetheless, what is demanded by Mohist impartiality would appear to go beyond what Confucius thought reasonable; it seems that Confucius and his followers look much more kindly upon the ethical valence of the special relationships between people grounded in certain social roles and positions they occupy. This is an ethical valence that is meant to *justify* differential treatment for associates as opposed to strangers (*Analects* 13.18). While the followers of Confucius, if pushed, might not disagree that one does not have permission to harm X in order to benefit Y just in virtue of the fact that X is a stranger while Y is a special relation, it is less clear that they would agree with the notion that those facts about X and Y in themselves are not even ethically relevant to whether one has an obligation to help or benefit one rather than the other.

This brings us back to an intriguing issue highlighted early on (Section 2). When first discussing the Mohist presentation of the evils that beset the world in each version of “*Jian'ai*,” I suggested that there are two distinguishable groups of such evils. To recap, the first group concerns how people who are related to each other in a special relationship (ruler-minister, father-son, siblings) fail to treat each other properly as befitting the conventionally understood terms of that relationship. The second group involves the more general phenomenon of destructive conflict and exploitation of the weak. But as these evils are presented, the Mohists do not distinguish them in the way above but instead speak of all as if they are on the same footing.

The issue is not that the Mohists failed to note the above distinction; rather, it is that their subsequent argument obscures it. Recall that on their account, the general description of people harming each other so as to benefit their own is meant to be a simplifying model, on the basis of which the tendency of people to care more for their own than others is put forward as the cause. But if so, we should wonder if it is an *over*-simplification: for it is unclear how it properly models what is problematic about the first group of evils, even as it fits the second group of evils quite well. In other words, it would seem that the Mohists assimilated the concerns regarding the first group of evils to those regarding the second group—they are all instances of people harming each other so as to benefit their own.

For instance, it is not obvious that the problematic about the son who is unfilial to his father or the father who has been unkind to his son is properly elucidated by the idea that one harmed the other so as to benefit oneself. Again, keep in mind that the Mohists are not just claiming that sons being unfilial and fathers not being kind are among the evils that beset the world but the more specific notion that they fall under their proposed simplifying model as instances of people harming the other so as to benefit oneself, on the basis of which a diagnosis for the evils is put forward. We can also put things in the reverse direction: however understood—whether as *BENEFITTING*, *HELPING*, or *NOT HARMING*—it is entirely unclear how *jian'ai* is supposed to provide a solution to the first group of evils if what is called for is that unfilial sons and unkind fathers, disloyal

¹² Graham argues that “Mozi’s ‘Concern for Everyone’ evidently derives from the ‘one thread’ of Confucius. But Confucius conceived it as a guideline through the variegated web of ritual obligations, while Mozi abstracts it as a transcendent principle by which the obligations themselves are to be judged. ‘Concern for Everyone’ is a concern for each person irrespective of relations of kinship with oneself. It is this relentless driving of a principle to its logical conclusion that gives Mohism its appearance of being foreign, not merely to Confucian thinking, but to the whole Chinese civilization as in these few centuries it assumes its lasting shape. No one else finds it tolerable to insist that you should be as concerned for the other man’s family as for your own” (Graham 1989: 42–43; see also Nivison 1996: 59–76).

ministers and uncaring rulers, and so on be restored to their proper relationships. One might think that such behavior as benefitting, helping, and not harming the father do not make (by themselves) a filial son; something more is needed (cf. *Analec*s 2.7). The question, again, concerns whether special relations have an ethical valence that is not exhausted by a “mutual care” that is mostly cashed out in terms of “mutual benefit”—especially since the relevant benefit is most plausibly spelled out in terms of helping others who have certain urgent needs—or even more minimally, a “mutual refraining from harm.”

What the above implies is that if the Mohist were serious about, for example, the filial relation (and other like relationships) such that their violation is among the evils that beset the world, then unless they have a revisionary or nonstandard understanding of what the filial relationship and other special relationships involve (i.e., these are all just modes of people helping or not harming each other), the main argument for *jian'ai* simply failed to establish part of its conclusion—the part relating to the first group of evils.¹³

Considered as an argument meant to provide a practical solution for the second group of evils the Mohists have a stronger case. Assuming that one is willing to grant the diagnosis of what causes the evils that beset the world, and that the various sorts of behavior identified as evils that beset the world are really that—evils that beset the world—and that their elimination would be a very desirable thing, then it does seem right to conclude that one has reason to act according to NOT HARMING. The strength of the Mohist case here relates to their taking a stand that resonates with our moral convictions: even if I do not agree that I have as much of a duty to help those who are not specially related to me as I do those who are, it is much less plausible to think that I have permission to harm them in pursuing the welfare of my own just in virtue of the fact that they are not specially related to me. Furthermore, if such a *dao* did guide people's interactions, it would follow that, everything being equal, there would be much less conflict and disorder than if they were to be guided by a contrary *dao*. However, to say all this is also to cast doubt on the notion that anything stronger is *required* by the terms of the Mohist argument, especially if their main concern is to do something about the endemic conflict between individuals and groups and the oppression of the weak by the strong that characterized life in Warring States China.

✓ The question now arises as to why the Mohists would insist upon a stronger version of *jian'ai*, hinting at it in Version B and explicitly advancing it in Version C. There are clues in the text suggestive of what might have motivated such a development. Recall how King Wen is cited in Version B as an example of a sage ruler of antiquity who practiced *jian'ai*. As pointed out earlier, he is only said not to do the thing that the powerful often do, that is, bully the weak (*Mozi* 15.36–37), suggesting a conception of *jian'ai* in terms of NOT HARMING. The sequel, however, is reminiscent of something that we find in Version C:

¹³ Could it be that the Mohists were assuming (whether openly or covertly) a revisionary or nonstandard understanding of what the filial relationship and other like special relationships involve? Robins argues that “throughout the *Mozi*, and especially in the ‘Inclusive Care’ triad, we find a commitment to the relational virtues and to differential treatment more generally. The widespread view that the Mohists intended their doctrine of inclusive care to rule these out is certainly false. And this implies that the aims of the argument were relatively modest; certainly there is little if anything in their view that runs contrary to today's moral common sense. There is also little if anything in it that runs contrary to *ru* moral philosophy” (Robins 2012: 66). This implies a negative answer to my question, which, if correct, accentuates the flaw in the main argument all the more.

Heaven took notice of King Wen's kindness, and so those who were old and without children were able to live out their lifespans, the lonely who were without brothers had the means to participate in the society of living men, the young who lost both their parents had the support they needed to grow into maturity. (*Mozi* 15.37–38; compare 16.19–20)

The interesting thing is that in this version, the good outcome described above is portrayed as a blessing of Heaven conferred upon King Wen on account of his conduct, rather than something that King Wen worked toward directly. So even though the positive duty to help others is not advanced in the passage, a more expansive conception of the good outcome that comes from adopting *jian'ai* is already present. It is but another step to get from here to Version C, where the more expansive conception of the desirable outcome is aimed at more directly by the practice of *jian'ai* rather than Heaven's reward for such conduct.



It is hard to be certain but presumably the Mohist decidedly practical orientation has something to do with the escalation of their explicit ethical demands. Since the Mohists—as with most other thinkers of the Classical Period—do not envision a complete elimination of the social, economic, and political inequalities that characterized life in ancient China, one way by which the ideal embodied in their conception of the common benefit of the world can be met would be to give some sort of extra weight to the interests of those who are less well off. With this in mind, I think it is only natural that the Mohist focus should shift from counseling that people should not harm others so as to benefit their own, to enjoining them to come to the aid of those in need, and perhaps even to benefit them in more substantial ways. This development is especially natural when we keep in mind that the bulk of their arguments is mainly directed at the social and political elite. For the worst off—“those who are old and without wives or children” and “the young and orphaned who have no parents”—ensuring that they are not taken advantage of by the powerful is only half the story; they need the positive aid of the better off if their situation is to have any improvement.

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