

Mo Zi's Essay

Identification with the Superior (Excerpts)

In the beginning of human life, when there was yet no law and government, the custom was "everybody according to his own idea." Accordingly each man had his own idea, two men had two different ideas and ten men had ten different ideas -- the more people the more different notions. And everybody approved of his own view and disapproved the views of others, and so arose mutual disapproval among men. As a result, father and son and elder and younger brothers became enemies and were estranged from each other, since they were unable to reach any agreement. Everybody worked for the disadvantage of the others with water, fire, and poison. Surplus energy was not spent for mutual aid; surplus goods were allowed to rot without sharing; excellent teachings (Dao) were kept secret and not revealed. The disorder in the (human) world could be compared to that among birds and beasts.

As we look back to the time when there was yet no ruler, it seems the custom was "everybody in the world according to his own standard." Accordingly each man had his own standard, ten men had ten different standards, a hundred men had a hundred different standards - the more people the more standards. And everybody approved of his own view and disapproved those of others, and so arose mutual disapproval. Even father and son and brothers became enemies, since they were unable to reach any agreement. Surplus energy was not employed for mutual help; excellent teachings (Dao) were kept secret; surplus goods were allowed to rot without sharing. The disorder in the (human) world could be compared with that among birds and beasts.

In the beginning there was no ruler and everybody was independent. Since everyone was independent, there would be one purpose when there was one man, ten purposes when there were ten men, a hundred purposes when there were a hundred men, a thousand purposes when there were a thousand men and so on until the number of men became innumerable and the number of different purposes became innumerable with it. And all of them approved their own ideas and disapproved those of others. And there was strife among the strong and struggle among the weak. ...

But how can the desires of the people (being so many and various) be met? Therefore Mozi said: It can be done only by adopting the principle of Identification with the Superior in government. ...

Yet all this disorder was due to the want of a ruler. Therefore (Heaven) chose the virtuous in the world and crowned him emperor. Feeling the insufficiency of his capacity, the emperor chose the virtuous in the world and installed them as the three ministers. The emperor and the three ministers, seeing the vastness of the empire and the difficulty of attending to matters of right and wrong and profit and harm among peoples of far countries, divided the empire into feudal states and assigned them to feudal lords. Feeling the insufficiency of their capacity, the feudal lords, in turn, chose the virtuous of their states and appointed them as their officials.

Thereupon Heaven wished to unify the standards in the world. The virtuous was selected and made emperor., when Heaven established the empire and located the capital and commissioned the sovereign, kings, lords, and dukes, and appointed secretaries, scholars, professors, and elders - it was not to give them ease, but only to divide up the task and let them help carry out the light of Heaven.

When the rulers were all installed, the emperor issued a mandate to all the people, saying: "Upon hearing good or evil one shall report it to a superior. What the superior thinks to be right all shall think to be right; what the superior thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong. ...

Now the head of the village was the most high-minded and tender-hearted man of the village. He notified the people of the village, saying: "Upon hearing good or evil you shall report it to the head of the district. What the head of the district thinks to be right, all shall think to be right. What he thinks to be wrong, all shall think to be wrong. Put away from your speech that which is not good and learn his good speech. Remove from your conduct that which is not good and learn his good conduct. How then can there be disorder in the district?"

The head of the district was the most high-minded and tender-hearted man of the district. He notified the people of the district, saying "Upon hearing good or evil you shall report it to the lord. 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. Remove from your speech that which is not good and learn his good speech. Take away from your conduct that which is not good and learn his good conduct. How then can there be disorder in the state?"

The lord of the state was the most high-minded and tender-hearted man of the state. He notified the people of the state, saying: "Upon hearing good or evil you shall report it to the emperor. What the emperor thinks to be right all shall think to be right; what the emperor thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong. Take away from your speech that which is not good and learn his good speech. Remove from your conduct that which is not good and learn his good conduct. How then can there be disorder in the empire?" Now, how is order brought about in the empire? There was order in the empire because the emperor could unify the standards in the empire.

If there should be common cause with subordinates and no identification with the superior - this is what deserves punishment from above and condemnation from below." The superior made this the basis of reward and punishment. ...

Therefore, Mozi said: The sage-kings of old devised the five punishments to rule the people in order to be able to lay hands on those who did not identify themselves with their superiors - a device of the same nature as threads are tied into skeins and a net is controlled by a main rope.

And so all the people aspired to the rewards and commendation from the superior and dreaded his condemnation and punishment.

Thereupon, in accord with the policy of the emperor, the village head proceeded to unify the purposes in the village. Having accomplished this, he led the people of the village to identify themselves with the head of the district, saying: "All you people of the village are to identify yourselves with the head of the district, and are not to unite with the subordinates. What the head of the district thinks to be right all shall think to be right; what he thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong. Put away your evil speech

and learn his good speech; put away your evil conduct and learn his good conduct. For the head of the district is naturally the (most) virtuous of the district. If all the people in the district follow the example of their head, how then can the district be disorderly?"

Having accomplished this he in turn led the people of his district to identify themselves with the feudal lord, saying: "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. Put away your evil speech and learn his good speech; put away your evil conduct and learn his good conduct. 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, how then can the state be in disorder?" Now, why was the feudal lord so successful in governing the state? It was just because he could unify the purposes in the state that the state is orderly.

Having accomplished this he in turn led the people of his state to identify themselves with the emperor, saying: "All you people of the state shall identify yourselves with the emperor and shall not unite with the subordinates. What the emperor thinks to be right all shall think to be right; what he thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong. Put away your evil speech and learn his good speech; put away your evil conduct and learn his good conduct. For the emperor is naturally the (most) high-minded and tender-hearted man of the empire. If all the people of the empire follow his example, how then can the state be disorderly?" Now, why was the emperor so successful in governing the empire? It was just because he could unify the purposes in the empire that the empire is orderly.

Just as there is one thread to hold together the others in a skein and a main rope to a fishing net, so the ruler is to hold together all the evil and wicked in the empire and bring their purposes into harmony (with their superiors).

In governing the country, the ruler proclaims "Whoever deserves reward I will reward." ... In governing the country, again, the ruler proclaims: "Whoever deserves punishment I will punish."

Now, in governing the country and ruling the people, if rewards cannot encourage the people to do good and punishments cannot restrain them from doing evil, is this not just the same as in the beginning of human life when there were no rulers?

Now that the empire becomes orderly, the emperor will further organize the purposes in the empire and identify them with the Will of Heaven. Therefore Identification with the Superior as a principle can govern the empire when used by the emperor, it can govern the state when used by the feudal lord, and it can govern the clan when used by the clan patriarch.

The interest of the wise (ruler) lies in carrying out what makes for order among the people and avoiding what makes for confusion.