

OWEN FLANAGAN

MORAL CONTAGION AND LOGICAL PERSUASION IN THE *MOZI* 《墨子》¹

I. MEASURING MOZI BY MODERN EMPIRICAL STANDARDS

Mozi speaks often and passionately about moral transformation, about how to get from a situation of disorder and vice to one of order and virtue. This is a perennial problem, one we also have.² What help can Mozi be with our problems with vice and disorder? What is now known about which among the methods advocated by Mozi—emulation, logical persuasion, and punishment and reward—are most effective in producing and maintaining virtue and order?

Mozi's views about moral transformation can be assessed by standards internal to philosophy—accurate reading, internal consistency, challenging and worthy ideals—and in terms of their credibility from the perspective of cognitive and social psychology and neuroscience—in terms of psychological realism and truthfulness.³

Here I examine Mozi's views about the descriptive and normative roles of emulation and logical persuasion in moral transformation in light of the empirical evidence. There is now a large body of scientific literature that addresses questions about imitation and emulation which are central to debates in classical Chinese philosophy, especially between Confucius and Mozi: How powerful a role does emulation play in moral development and transformation? Does the emulation device copy behavior *or* action—that is, behavior alone or physical movement plus intention/motive? What counts as emulation success? Is it getting the behavior or the action (intention/motive + behavior) right? How many exposures or trials are required for emulation to become fixed or habitual? Does the emulator come with initial settings that are indiscriminate and lead to copying whatever is presented (as in a moral tabula rasa) *or* do the initial settings favor copying virtue and not copying vice? If (and when) emulation is not possible, when there are no (or an insufficient number of) models with the target trait, are there any other techniques—specifically for present purposes, logical persuasion—that can do the work that emulation normally does?

OWEN FLANAGAN, James B. Duke Professor, Department of Philosophy, Co-Director Center for Comparative Philosophy, Duke University. Specialties: philosophy of mind, moral psychology, and comparative philosophy. E-mail: ojf@duke.edu

II. EMULATION AND THE SAGE KING PROBLEM

It is a familiar fact that emulation plays a major role in socio-moral transformation in Confucianism. But emulation is central to moral socialization for Mozi as well. Indeed, according to Donald Munro, in classical Chinese philosophy generally, model emulation was “not just one way of learning; it was by far the most efficient way.”⁴

A common trope runs this way: If there are a sufficient number of virtuous (e.g., *ren* 仁) role models in place, and if the emulation mechanism functions normally (as it is supposed to, i.e., as a reliable copying mechanism), then a virtuous polity comprised of virtuous citizens will be produced, maintained, and reproduced. Thanks to the facts that humans are imitators and naturally attracted to virtue and order and not attracted to vice and disorder, individuals and the groups they comprise will tend toward a virtuous equilibrium.

Emulation is initially noncognitive: All else being equal, the natural, unreflective disposition of persons is to imitate virtue. However, due to perturbations, especially in complex social environments, all is not equal, at least not always. This premise, *the perturbation premise*, is required to explain how we got off track from the golden age of the sage kings. *The sage king problem* comes from conjoining three premises from the *Analects*: (1) Virtue is attractive, more so, at any rate, than vice; (2) Model emulation is the main way virtue is acquired, maintained, and perpetuated; (3) Once upon a time there existed exceedingly well-positioned *ren* role models, the sage kings.

Taken together (1) & (2) & (3) make it difficult to understand how both the current leaders and the populace got to a non-*ren* state—given that *ren* was once so perfectly modeled. To be sure, sometime after the noble reigns of Yao and Shun, monarchs ceased promoting the worthy and instead introduced partiality (*bie* 別) and nepotism; but that could not have caused *ren* and *zhi* 治 (order) to come undone, for the first act of promoting the unworthy (whenever it took place) was itself a non-*ren*, non-*yi* 義 (righteous), and non-*zhi* (disorderly) action. How a truly virtuous leader modeling truly virtuous ancestors who themselves emulated the sage kings got the bad idea to act in this non-*ren* way, which then became widespread, is hard to fathom if (1) & (2) & (3) are true.

Furthermore, even if we can explain somehow, how the bad practice first occurred—suppose it was due to an unmotivated neural network mishap in the mind of the first monarch to perpetrate the bad idea—we cannot, on the assumption that virtue is attractive, explain how partiality (*bie*) came to abound. If virtue truly is an attractor then one or a few vicious acts ought not to be copied and their conse-

quences ought to dissipate quickly. *The sage king problem* is the problem of explaining both how non-*ren* (re)started once there were sage kings in place and how—what is even more puzzling—non-*ren* became abundant given (1) & (2) & (3).

Mozi, like Confucius, expresses nostalgia for the model (*fa* 法) of the sage kings. Mozi tells us that the sage kings promoted the worthy, and gave no special consideration to their own kin, to those of wealth and high social status, or to the good-looking and attractive.⁵ For Mozi, like Confucius, the sage king model is the right one. But for Mozi the sage kings, some of them at any rate, were more than *ren*. They were beyond *ren*. They had to be beyond *ren* because *ren*, as conceived by Confucius, is not good enough, is not the highest virtue. The sage kings operated with the virtue, or, what is different, the principle of *jian ai* 兼愛 (impartial care), working for the good of all equally.⁶

A credible Moist solution to *the sage king problem* can be charitably extracted from the text as follows: Either odd catastrophic outcomes can sometimes occur (the tsunami strikes) so that even an idyllic situation can come undone, or there is something wrong with *ren* as conceptualized by Confucius. The odd outcome possibility fits well with the odd, inexplicable workings of Confucian *ming* 命 (fate), which Mozi rejects as a global metaphysical thesis but could presumably accept as an explanation for a certain class of outcomes—quirky contingencies—not under human control.⁷ But it is the idea that *ren* might contain within itself the germ of its own dissolution, which is really interesting, fits best with Mozi's overall celebration of *jian ai* over *ren*, and which explains why he is almost always viewed as something of a heretic (more, at any rate, than a thoughtful critic) from the perspective of Confucian orthodoxy. What might the bad germ in *ren* be? It is its tendency to work—first developmentally and then as endorsed conceptually⁸—through partiality, and thus to energize and support egoism, partiality, and family chauvinism. *Jian ai* is bred precisely not to contain the bad germ, or bad tendency. So it—*jian ai*—is a better standard (*fa* 法) than *ren*. Copying *jian ai* will produce stability of virtue and order; copying *ren* will not.⁹

Mozi, of course, does not say all this. But I claim it is a charitable reconstruction of what a fully consistent Mozi should say, what a worked out Moist philosophy might claim against the opposition (make believe I am an adviser to Mozi telling him what he ought to say, the way Mencius is able to assist the Confucian cause by being entitled to say what Confucius meant). In order to solve *the sage king problem*, Mozi would need to add that even if most of the sage kings practiced *jian ai*, one or more must have been merely *ren*, which would explain how the non-righteous (*bu yi* 不義) choice to promote one's own rather than the most worthy started up (again).

Both Confucius and Mozi give emulation pride of place. The shared psychological picture has two components with different emphases on (1) & (2) each depending on context: first, an innate emulation mechanism with certain initial settings (“copy virtue, don’t copy vice”); second, education and self-cultivation practices and public institutions designed to refine, monitor, and then maintain the raw output of the emulator.

Minimally, just as there is a need to monitor and refine the output of the natural methods used by the body to maintain homeostasis and health and avoid disease, so too practices of reflection, self-cultivation, the study of wisdom literature, and logical persuasion plus public institutions that employ carrots and sticks can all be used to leverage and refine the natural noncognitive tendency to copy good ways of living and being, so that any overreaching or underreaching can be adjusted. These other practices would be especially valuable to get us back on track when there is dysfunction due to odd causal outcomes of the normal emulation regimen, or as a prophylactic against such odd outcomes. I don’t see that either Confucius or Mozi ever state or imply that emulation is sufficient for virtue. For Mozi it is not always even necessary. I will explain.

III. MOZI AND DISPASSIONATE ARGUMENT

Like me, Munro suggests that Mozi, like all classical Chinese philosophers, gives emulation of morally appealing role models a central role in his theory of moral education and transformation. Indeed, Mozi’s advocacy of emulation is what makes sense of his emphasis on the importance of having “worthy superiors” to identify with.¹⁰ But David B. Wong thinks that Mozi is exceptional in distrusting emulation, possibly going as far as to reject emulation altogether as a trustworthy mechanism for moral guidance, and recommending that we replace emulation with methods and standards of moral assessment guided solely by dispassionate logical analysis of what is right (*yi*). Wong writes that Mozi, in contrast with Confucius, “emphasizes the need for detachment from emotions . . . [t]he *dispassionate intellect alone is necessary and sufficient for discovering the truth.*”¹¹ Wong goes on to say this:

Mozi’s faith in the power of dispassionate intellect, his conception of the discovery of truth as a contest to be decided by the best arguments, his emphasis on articulated standards and principles rather than the cultivated and contextualized wisdom of the Confucian *junzi*, or for that matter the Daoist sage, are all more typical of the western tradition.¹²

Elsewhere, Wong speaks for many when he writes that Mozi's arguments for *jian ai* over the Confucian model, according to which conscientious love for family grows outward from each family node so that eventually everyone is cared for by everyone,¹³ are "genuinely shallow and unimportant."¹⁴ Wong (following Schwartz) adds to his overall critique the charge that Mozi is a behaviorist, that his ethics is "wholly outer-directed."¹⁵ The contrast, of course, is with Confucius (and Mencius) who provides a subtler picture of psychic complexity and depth, a picture of the inner contours of the human mind, upon which true virtue, as opposed to mere behavioral conformity, necessarily turns.

Could it be that Mozi claims that emotional attachment, role modeling, imitation, emulation, and the attractive force of embodied virtue have no effect on moral development and education? Or could it be that Mozi accepts that emulation, broadly construed, *is* causally efficacious, but recommends that we *eliminate* or *overcome* emulation and replace it as a moral guide by "the dispassionate intellect"? The answer to both questions is "no." Mozi *accepts* that emulation in fact plays an important role in moral development, and he thinks that it should do so. As I read Mozi, he agrees with the Confucians on the potency and usefulness of emulation. If there are virtuous exemplars to model, then emulation can suffice more or less (contra Wong) to produce virtue. But in a situation in which there are no *ren* persons (or too few) to copy, the emulating mechanism cannot produce a *ren* populace as output.

Because of this problem, there is one point in the *Mozi*—and it is a crucial one—where Mozi argues that Confucian methods—specifically modeling *ren*—cannot work, or cannot be trusted to work, to bring about a virtuous and orderly polity.¹⁶ And the reason is both deliciously simple, and acknowledged by Confucius: The role models are not-*ren*. Indeed, according to Mozi, many of the potential role models are not-*ren* in a particularly vicious way: They are partial (*bie*), family nepotists, and village chauvinists. In such a situation, we will need to *persuade logically* those with moral and political power (crossing our fingers that they are sincere) and convince them to self-cultivate and embody some high-minded virtue or principle such as *jian ai*, or (perhaps as second best) a sufficiently broad kind of *ren* that is advertised as the goal of the Confucian *junzi* 君子 but, according to Mozi, not remotely realized by them. Only when such a high-minded, worthy virtue is once again embodied in the world can we trust emulation to do its handy work; otherwise, emulation copies what is not-*ren*, perhaps that which is beneath both *ren* and not-*ren*, and thus so pathetic that it is beneath contempt, as we say.

In a situation where there is no virtue to copy, emulation is neither necessary nor sufficient for producing virtue and order. Emulation can do no work in a situation where what is worth copying does not even exist. Something else is needed. We have just seen what this is: logical persuasion. Only if the arguments in favor of self-cultivating virtue (specifically, *jian ai*) can win over some hearts and minds can the right models come to exist (once again).

This argument is made when Mozi rises to meet his own ever-present challenge of offering a positive alternative, so as not to add water to a flood.¹⁷ The flood is caused by the river of not-*ren* and not-*zhi* (order), fed by the Confucians who (perhaps inadvertently) endorse modeling *ren* when there is not any (or enough) around, causing the waters of non-*ren* to rise. What to do? How to stop the flood? Mozi's answer is to accept the logical arguments in favor of cultivating *jian ai* so that a worthy kind of virtue can be cultivated and then modeled. It is at this point only that Mozi suggests that logic is necessary. It is dubious to think that Mozi also thought that logic was sufficient to convince skeptics of the wisdom of *jian ai* as a replacement for *ren*; certainly it is not sufficient for bringing about the desired socio-moral transformation. That would require multifarious methods: ending extravagant and useless practices (burying wealth with rich folk), ending unfair practices (entertainment for the rich only), punishing vice, making war for gain unfashionable, creating an environment in which logic appeals as much as self-interest, and so on.

One problem for both Confucius and Mozi, regardless of whether *ren* or *jian ai* is the preferred or master virtue or principle, involves dependence on the idea that virtue is attractive and vice is not. The idea that virtue is attractive is flattering, but is it true? The evidence suggests that the idea that virtue is an attractor, in and of itself, is false.

IV. IMITATION SCIENCE:

A PRIMER (OR, MOZI AND THE MIRROR NEURON SYSTEM)

Despite expressions about “parroting” and “aping,” which suggest that imitation is a lowly animal function, we now know that it is rare except among *Homo sapiens*. Recent research in anthropology, primatology, psychology, and cognitive and social neuroscience reveals the following:¹⁸

- *Imitation is the default human social learning strategy.*
- *Imitation is social glue.*
- *Imitation leads to liking.*¹⁹

- Imitation is importantly implicated in such skills as *self-knowledge* and *knowledge of other minds*.
- Imitation involves much more than *mere behavioral mimicry* thanks to certain brain equipment that includes the *mirror neuron system*, which is designed to simulate or copy the *mental states* (of others) that subserve (their) behavior.
- *Mirror neurons are known to be active when I do certain things and when I observe others doing those things, i.e., perform those same actions.* Mirror neurons that are active when I feel pain are also active when I imagine loved ones in pain. The mirror neuron system supports inferences about what other people feel, experience, and are doing, not just what bodily movement they are performing.
- *Imitation works on both the outer—the behavioral, and on the inner—the mental:* “the relevant research has shown by now that imitation can make us slow, fast, smart, stupid, good at math, bad at math, helpful, rude, polite, long-winded, hostile, aggressive, cooperative, competitive, conforming, nonconforming, conservative, forgetful, careful, careless, neat, and sloppy.”²⁰
- *Imitation is generally indiscriminate:* “The chameleon effect”—a mainstay of imitation research—says that we will pick up and/or imitate what the social environment offers up be it violence from television or cigarette smoking and brand preference from books and movies.
- *There are no data—exactly none—that indicate that virtue is more attractive than non-virtue.*²¹

V. HOW IMITATION SCIENCE MATTERS TO THE CONFUCIUS–MOZI DEBATE

In light of this research consider a particularly strong claim about moral emulation that Hagop Sarkissian calls the *moral contagion hypothesis*.²² The *moral contagion hypothesis* says this: If there are a small number of *ren* exemplars, then *ren* will spread like a powerful virus in a susceptible population.²³ At 9.14 of *Analects*, Confucius expresses his wish to visit the nine barbarian (non-Chinese) tribes. One of his students wonders why he would wish to visit such unruly (*lou* = uncouth) people. Confucius calmly and rhetorically replies that “If a gentleman (*junzi*) were to dwell among them, what uncouthness would there be?”²⁴

In addition to 9.14, Confucius powerfully suggests or asserts that the *ren* of *junzi* will spread like wildfire or an especially virulent virus in at least eighteen passages.²⁵ But he gives reason for being skeptical

about the *moral contagion hypothesis* in at least twelve other passages.²⁶ I do not claim to have cited every passage pro and con, but the 18:12 ratio seems a good indication of the relative direction and weight of ambivalence (pro to con) expressed in the *Analects*. The pro *moral contagion* passages mostly state the hypothesis rather than give reasons for it—*besides*, that is, from the claim that virtue is an attractor. The reasons against the hypothesis include the following: It is next to impossible to find anyone who is really *ren*; virtue is hard, requiring extraordinary efforts at self-cultivation; some, possibly many, people are petty, thick, stupid, and evil; there is the (bad) influence of charismatic people with “glib tongues,” and of “the village worthy, thief of virtue.”²⁷

For Confucius it is the reasons that weigh against the *moral contagion hypothesis* that make methods other than emulation necessary for moral transformation. Watchfulness and wariness, as well as self-cultivation techniques, are required because although good people are constant, so are bad people, that is, both are hard to change. When one looks around for a *junzi* of *ren* one often finds a counterfeit, someone who *seems* good, but is not—a *ren* conformist perhaps, but not the real thing. *Ren* is not, despite a certain naive hopefulness otherwise, something one just catches as one catches the flu; *ren* requires difficult work of self-cultivation, work one does ideally with support of friends who are the *junzi* of *ren*, and finally there are many things—sex, for example²⁸—which can disorient or tempt even the virtuous person to step off the path of righteousness.

The empirical work on imitation is relevant here in several ways, but most importantly, it spells doom for the ideas that (i) the emulator mechanism is set to copy virtue and avoid vice; and thus that (ii) a few very virtuous souls, be they the sage kings of yore or a handful of *junzi* of *ren* now, could bring about the goal of (iii) a return to social and personal order (*zhi*) and virtue (*ren*).

VI. MOIST MORAL CONTAGION?

Mozi thinks, as Confucius does, that virtue has special and unusual attractive features:

If you were really able to establish a reputation for righteousness in the world and attract the other rulers by your virtue, then it would be no time at all before the whole world had submitted to you, for the world has for a long time been plagued by warfare and is as weary as a little boy who has spent the day playing horse.²⁹

Mozi's optimism about the attractive features of true virtue is such that he claims that order, harmony, and virtue can take hold in as little as one generation if the leaders are virtuous.

Again in the past King Goujian of Yue admired bravery and for three years trained his soldiers and subjects to be brave. But he was not sure whether they had understood the true meaning of bravery, so he set fire to his warships and then sounded the drum to advance. The soldiers trampled each other down in their haste to go forward, and countless numbers of them perished in the fire and water. At that time, even though he ceased to drum them forward, they did not retreat. The soldiers of Yue were truly astonished. Now consigning one's body to the flames is a difficult thing to do, and yet they did it because it pleased the king of Yue. *So within the space of a single generation the ways of the people can be changed*, for they will strive to ingratiate themselves with their superiors.³⁰ (My italics)

There are several things worth noticing about the passage, some good for Mozi, some puzzling, and some not so good. First, King Goujian of Yue trains his troops to be brave for three years. The barbarian tribes in 9.14 are not trained at all; they are simply exposed to virtue and then become virtuous, or at least couth. Second, the claim is that transformation can occur in as little as one generation; however long a generation is, it is certainly not overnight, not as short a period as a transformative visit of a *junzi* of *ren* among barbarians might be.³¹ But third, there is something odd about the ideas that trampling each other shows the “true nature” of bravery, or that doing so would be what pleased the king. Indeed, it is this sort of example which raises legitimate questions about whether Mozi really does understand the inner side of mind, specifically whether he understands that becoming brave, or realizing any other virtue for that matter, requires not just performing the required behaviors or bodily movements, but also—and even more importantly—regulating one's behavior by the right motives and intentions, by refined discernment of what a particular situation calls for, and not, as in the quoted passage, by a simultaneously callow and extreme, naive and insane, kind of reckless abandon that pleases the ruler.

One might think that this last criticism secures once more the common point that Moist techniques cannot yield what we want—in this case, “true bravery.” But here the empirical research may, oddly enough, help Mozi. Yes, we want more than behavioral conformity. And true bravery, true honesty, true filial piety, and true practice of the rites require that the inner, the mental, be coordinated with the outer, the behavioral. Being brave is not simply a matter of behaving in a brave manner (in this case oddly so), but experiencing courage or mustering it, as we say, and making sensible evaluative judgments about the right kind of brave action to perform. But notice two things: King Goujian of You could not have trained his troops by actually consigning his own body to flames or those of the trainers. But second, according to the imitation research, he would not have needed to.

Why? Because thanks to the way we have evolved and thus to the way the emulation device is set up (wired, if you will) “three years of training” will set up a complex behavioral *and* mental habit. The system, recall, includes the mirror neurons set to imitate the teacher’s behavior, and also to simulate and imitate his intentions and motives. Becoming truly brave involves acquiring a psycho-behavioral habit, not just mimicking what looks brave. To be sure, the research shows that if there were training films or lectures favoring a form of bravery that resulted in self-immolation this could be learned—probably since it goes against basic instincts—with difficulty. But the key point is that when brave behavior is taught it is inevitable that a coordinated inner psychology subserving that behavior will be set up. Even if it is true that Mozi focuses on the outer (behavioral) and not the inner, the research on emulation shows that it is impossible for *Homo sapiens* not to set up a habit, which is both psychological and behavioral. How the habit is configured is, of course, a complicated matter that depends on the specifics of the training, in this case three years worth, what the king said, did, what his trainers taught and conveyed, and so on.

I see no evidence that Mozi, unlike Confucius (in as many as eighteen passages), accepts *the moral contagion hypothesis*. This is good because *the moral contagion hypothesis* is highly implausible despite being pretty and hopeful. The latter passage with the King of Yue is where arguably he comes closest, but even there the example pertains to the acquisition of one virtue, not to an entire characterological makeover. Second, the behavior is acquired more by reinforcement or by identification with the king’s wishes than by imitation of his behavior or bearing. Finally the transformation is not thought to occur overnight. Overall, Mozi is skeptical of the *moral contagion hypothesis* for many of the reasons Confucius himself ambivalently cites against it. Political structures that make the law public and punishments for law-breaking clear are necessary components of a good society. The more virtue has spread thanks to the modeling (*fa*) of virtue, as well as moral instruction by virtuous leaders and fellow citizens, the less “sticks” (as opposed to carrots) will need to be employed.³² But Mozi is rightly and consistently skeptical that modeling *ren* can be expected to do what Confucius (sometimes) suggests it can. And it certainly can’t if hardly anyone is *ren*. Something other than modeling *ren* is required in a situation where there is no *ren* to model, something that could create the necessary number of *ren* role models who could then be emulated. How could this (new) first generation of the *junzi* of *ren* come (once again) to exist so that they can then be modeled? Mozi’s answer is this: We will have to convince by logical persuasion alone some leaders in the current generation to self-cultivate impartial (*jian*) virtue. Then and only then, can emula-

tion of these logically persuaded and subsequently self-cultivated exemplars take over the job of perpetuating and maintaining virtue.

Like all ancient Chinese thinkers, Mozi believes that virtue is attractive, and he is hopeful that once true virtue (*jian ai*) is in place among powerful political leaders who have been convinced by logical argument that embodying impartiality is right, it will spread to neighboring kings, and then to their people who are rightly exhausted by vice and disorder. The trick is to get to the first stage—*stage one*—where the elders possess the right virtue to be copied; and this, given the current sorry state of things, will require logical argument and persuasion.

VII. EMULATING VIRTUE OR EMULATING THE EFFECTS OF VIRTUE

One important question is whether, if virtue is attractive and vice is unattractive, it has to do with virtue *itself* and vice *itself*, or with the *characteristic effects* of virtue and vice. The problem can be put this way: Suppose that there is a world in which virtue goes from being rare to being common and widespread. If this happened we might infer that virtue is attractive and vice is unattractive. Maybe. But we would not know if the attractiveness of virtue is because of *intrinsic properties* that virtue possesses relative to vice, or whether it is due to *extrinsic properties* that virtue, but not vice, possesses—for example, that virtue but not vice produces order, or that virtue is rewarded and vice is punished. This question matters, since as I read both Confucius and Mozi (and even more so Mencius), virtue is an attractor intrinsically. But here the empirical imitation research provides a pretty clear verdict that this is not so. The emulator mechanism or device copies indiscriminately, but is very sensitive to a reward and punishment regimen.

VIII. CONFUCIAN PERFORMATIVE INCONSISTENCY #1: XEROXING BLANK PAGES

Here I draw together the threads of the analysis provided thus far: Both Confucius and Mozi want the same end state, an orderly and virtuous citizenry and polity, and both think that model emulation will play an important role in getting from a state where there is little *ren* to one where it abounds. But Mozi claims that there is a *performative inconsistency* in the *Analects* insofar as Confucius recommends copying non-*ren* models to get *ren*. Of course, Confucius does not

recommend this explicitly, but the net effect is to do so inadvertently: Confucius laments the lack of *ren* in the world while at the same time continuing to speak as if we are at the stage—what I call, *stage one*—where there are enough role models who are *ren* to gain real traction on the problem of restoring order and virtue. But we are not at that stage. And thus model emulation will not do the trick. If model emulation was a reliable copying mechanism then getting from *stage one* to the *end state* would not be a problem *if we were at stage one*. But we are not *at stage one*.

The argument can be put this way:

1. Confucius advocates moving from a situation in which most people are not virtuous (*bu ren*) to one in which everyone is *ren* (assume Mozi agrees on the current situation *and* on the *end state*).
2. According to Confucius, moral education works primarily, but not exclusively, through moral role models (assume Mozi also accepts this).
3. To achieve the *end state* (advocated in [1] by both Confucius and Mozi), Confucius advocates establishing an environment (*stage one*) in which virtuous *junzi* model virtue, which ordinary people then copy. *Rationale*: virtue is attractive, and thus if a sufficient number of people worth emulating (sage kings, politicians, parents) are in place at *stage one*, then the reliable replicating mechanism of moral emulation will make *ren* abundant. At the point when virtue begins to abound, education and self-cultivation practices can be deployed full force to refine and perfect it.
4. But Confucius provides no plausible theory for getting to *stage one*, and thus does nothing to advance the goal expressed in (1).
5. This is because on the hypothesis that moral education works primarily through moral role models who all parties agree are not-*ren*, the role model emulator mechanism cannot output or produce *ren* people. Xeroxing blank pages yield blank pages.

IX. CONFUCIAN PERFORMATIVE INCONSISTENCY #2: SELFISH SONS AND CLIMBING TREES FOR FISH

Compare the latter argument designed to reveal a performative inconsistency in Confucianism as a practical philosophy with (my reconstruction of) Weixiang Ding's reconstruction of Mozi's argument against *bie* and in favor of *jian ai*.³³

1. Confucius advocates cherishing family first, with the circle of concern expanding from one's own family to other families, then to one's village, nation state, neighboring states, and so on.³⁴
2. But this method (which, according to Mozi, assumes dangerously and/or falsely that partiality—*bie*—is good) leads practically and/or logically to sons who care only for themselves and not their fathers.
3. Confucian *ren* and *ai* aim for “mutual cherishing and care between people.” But they will actually lead to egoism and disorder. “From Mozi’s viewpoint, using this kind of principle to strive for the happiness of humanity was no doubt like riding north to go south or climbing a tree to seek fish.”³⁵

X. CONFUCIAN PERFORMATIVE INCONSISTENCY #3: WORK HARD AND FATE WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU

A third structurally identical Moist argument, which claims that there is a performative inconsistency between Confucian ends and means, is discussed by Franklin Perkins.³⁶

1. Confucians advocate hard work.
2. But Confucians also advocate *ming* = fate.
3. The belief in fate (*ming*) makes laziness and passivity rational.
4. Confucians support in one way (behaviorally, e.g., hard work) what they do not support in another way (metaphysically, e.g., *ming*).

XI. THE GENERAL SCHEMA FOR CONFUCIAN PERFORMATIVE INCONSISTENCIES

The logic of all three Moist arguments is the same and can be expressed by this schema:

1. Confucius (or Confucians) believes we should aim for Ω , where $\Omega = \{\text{inter alia, } zhi \text{ (order), } yi \text{ (right), hard work, true belief, virtue}\}$.
2. Mozi (or Moists) also believes we should aim for Ω (i.e., Confucius and Mozi agree on ends, more or less).³⁷
3. Confucius claims that ϕ is a way (means) to Ω (e.g., that endorsing hard work *and* endorsing belief in *ming* = fate, supports order, virtue, and hard work *or* that modeling the elders will create a virtuous and orderly polity).

4. But Mozi claims that ϕ will not produce Ω , but rather will produce $\sim\Omega$.
5. Mozi is right that ϕ will produce $\sim\Omega$.

Now in every case where this argument form occurs, the argument involves not only showing that Confucius's strategy ϕ is self-defeating in relation to the shared end Ω , but also advancing an alternative Moist way (means) to gain the shared end Ω :

So,

6. Mozi claims, contra Confucius, that α is the way (means) to Ω .
7. It is true that α is the way (means) to Ω .

XII. WHAT IS α ?

This is a complicated question. α consists, first, of a *logical* or *cognitive* recognition or understanding that the Confucian argument or proposal has gone wrong in the specified way;³⁸ second, α involves recognition that the logical argument for the Moist means to the shared end is credible, so, for example, *jian ai* looks like the virtue that the sage kings possessed and like the right virtue to reacquire; third, some small number of potential role models who are convinced of the latter two points engage in self-cultivation practices in order to achieve *stage one* (or in the case of the second and third performative inconsistencies logic leads us to reject the belief in fate [*ming*] or our mindless advocacy of partiality [*bie*]); at which point, fourth, the emulator mechanism can be set in motion to produce and reproduce impartial virtue, or right view, or hard work, and so on.

This argument schema is both used and mentioned as the method of "considering (developing) two alternatives," when it is used to argue for the principle of *jian ai* (impartial care) over *bie* (partiality) in the *Mozi* Book 16. For each kind of performative inconsistency Mozi's claim is the same: Confucius makes a leadoff mistake. He wants people to work hard but is on about fate. He prizes impartiality but overemphasizes family loyalty. He endorses emulation when there is nothing worth copying. Parents, teachers, and rulers are abundant, but "those who are *ren* are few." "Modeling *not-ren*—it is not acceptable to take that as a model."³⁹

In the case of the first performative inconsistency the problem that occurs at the get-go is *the stage one problem*: To get to *stage one* where virtue can be produced and reproduced some few will need to be convinced by logical arguments that explain and reveal what true virtue is, namely, *jian ai*. Because *ex hypothesi* you cannot copy what does not exist in the world, virtue must be embodied for emulation of

virtue to be possible. Thus, logical arguments will need to suffice to get the first (post sage king) generation of teachers (back) to *stage one*. For this group of philosopher/teacher/activists, logic—pretty passionate logic—will need to suffice. But *contra* Wong, there is no evidence that logic will be necessary for everyone, especially once all the multifarious practices of self-cultivation, carrots and sticks, and model emulation are up and running together.

XIII. CONCLUSION: MORAL BLANK SLATES?

There is one final piece of business: What are the initial settings on the emulator system? All parties to the present discussion—Confucius, Mozi, and contemporary cognitive and social neuroscience—agree that model emulation plays a large role in moral development and transformation. But everyone who thinks for a minute knows that each species has certain characteristic phenotypic traits that make it the species it is, and further, that all these traits have a “learnability” or plasticity range. Parrots can imitate human speech but not the sparrows’ song; humans acquire language, frogs croak for sex, but say little else, and so on. Once we fix on the characteristic traits of a species, such as *Homo sapiens*, there are issues of environmental sensitivity and intraspecific variability. This is a vast topic. For present purposes it will suffice to point out that any inventory of common virtues and vices will need to acknowledge that there are settings in our nature that dispose people to want to save a child falling into a well, and also to covet their neighbor’s partner and property. We are fairly indiscriminate imitators but only within the range of plasticity that is distinctively human.

Consider the “chameleon effect” discussed previously. The chameleon effect says that virtue is not an attractor because of any intrinsic features of virtue compared to vice. Instead, the system tends toward imitating indiscriminately whatever psycho-behavioral trait it is exposed to, so long as it is rewarded or punished for so doing. The emulator, of course, is only indiscriminate within the characteristic values that trait ranges over for the species relative to the environment (which also has range values). Chameleons turn various shades of brown to green but they cannot turn magenta. This sort of commonplace matters to the assessment of Mozi’s moral psychology. Let me explain.

This is close to a scholarly consensus that Mozi holds the silly and extreme view that we are moral blank slates, and thus that human nature “is completely plastic and infinitely susceptible to manipulation.”⁴⁰ But there is no good evidence that Mozi holds such a view. Yes, there is considerably plasticity in human nature. When Mozi discusses

rulers who lead ministers to become anorexic because the ruler likes “thin waists,” or who get soldiers to engage in lemming-like suicide missions, he is disapproving of the bad rulers (although the King Goujian passage cited previously seems an endorsement of odd royal values). The kinds of examples Mozi uses are by now quite familiar (Hitler, Jim Jones in Ghana, the anorexia epidemic). Any credible view, including—in fact, especially—a Pollyannaish picture that paints us as born like little angels, will need to account for what goes wrong in cases such as these. Citing such cases shows nothing whatsoever about how malleable Mozi thinks humans are. The reason is that such cases need to be accounted for by any view of human nature. They happened. Confucius talks about them too.

So, Mozi concedes—as everyone must—a certain amount of plasticity. How much? It is unclear. Citing actual historical facts about bad or weird or sad things humans have felt, thought, and done says nothing, exactly zero, about what view the *Mozi* holds concerning human plasticity. Any credible psychology will have to explain such facts. If one believes that people will normally and reliably behave in ways that make sense, are rational, and lead to virtue and flourishing, then one appears to have special problems with such cases.

Mozi does think that there is one feature of human psychology that provides some immunity to being led down the wrong road or of stopping ourselves from spinning out of control, namely, we possess a rational faculty. And just as perhaps some kinds of virtue (some but certainly not all kinds of compassion) tug at us, so do good arguments. Put them together in the form of reasoned arguments that show some practice or policy is virtuous, where virtue is tied to good outcomes, and they can prove formidable.

For Mozi, when the citizenry are led by people of virtue and educated by rational methods, they are positioned to see the right and good, and follow the path of righteousness—eventually almost effortlessly (*wu wei*). But neither our natural attraction to virtue nor our natural attraction to reason, even taken together, is sufficient to immunize us against the effects of improper socialization, smooth talkers, and bad leaders in a nonvirtuous or disordered polity.

So Mozi does not answer the question of how malleable we are. It is not clear that he has any special burden to do so. But he certainly never suggests or implies—let alone asserts—that we are “infinitely malleable.” Again it is important to emphasize—it is crucial to my argument—that in addition to the false Confucian belief in the natural and intrinsic attractiveness of virtue, which Mozi shares to a degree, he also thinks that we are attracted to good reasoning, to logic and argument. Still, all thoughtful champions of rationality have been careful to point out how vulnerable reason is to manipulation.

One might read, therefore, the citations of cases where people are misled by charismatic fools, group-think, tendencies to conformism, and conservatism about practices that they are used to, not simply as historical facts, but as especially troubling examples of some of the ways our rational faculties can be circumvented. If knowledge is power, then such information about our psychological weaknesses and quirks is useful, an important contribution to our realistic understanding of our psychology. In fact, some of the weaknesses and quirks Mozi calls our attention to, for example, mindless conformism, form the basis of explanations offered after the Second World War for the complicity of otherwise decent people with the Nazis.⁴¹

I have not retrieved a complete moral psychology from the *Mozi*. I do not see that one is there to be recovered. But I hope to have said enough to defeat the common charge that Mozi believes that we are moral blank slates who are “infinitely malleable.” Mozi has much valuable to say about moral emulation works, about both its power and the pitfalls of depending exclusively on it to make us flower into virtuous bouquets.

DUKE UNIVERSITY
Durham, North Carolina

ENDNOTES

My dear friend and colleague David B. Wong sent me to Mozi in 2003 when we cotaught a course in comparative ethics. My criticisms of Wong on Mozi count as the sort of compliment philosopher-friends give to each other for challenging ideas. My student and friend Hagop Sarkissian has taught me more than anyone else about how to read and think about Chinese philosophy. Others who have been enormously helpful in encouraging my work in this area are Chris Fraser, Ted Slingerland, Hui-chieh Loy, Kim-Chong Chong, Dan Robins, Chad Hansen, P. J. Ivanhoe, Kwong-loi Shun, and Franklin Perkins. I also thank Professor Chung-ying Cheng, the Editor-in-Chief, JCP, and Dr. Linyu Gu, Managing Editor, JCP.

1. As I began to work on this essay on the role of imitation, emulation, and contagion, the cover story in *Mother Jones* (January/February 2008) was this: “*Can the world survive China’s headlong rush to emulate the American way of life?*”
2. When I refer to Mozi’s views I am referring to the views expressed in the *Mozi*. Attributing the views to a person, be it Mozi or Confucius, is simply a convenience for attributing views to two traditions that advertise themselves as different by way of distinct iconic monikers.
3. Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
4. Donald Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 96.
5. “Honoring the Worthy” (pt. I, sec. 8) and “Identifying with One’s Superiors” (pt. I, sec. II), in Burton Watson, trans., *Mozi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 21, 31. All references to the *Mozi* are to Watson, by chapter, section, and page number.
6. “Universal Love,” pt. III, sec. 16, pp. 46–47.
7. See Franklin Perkins, this issue.

8. *Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 1.2, 1.6.
9. Confucians say that Mozi unnecessarily (and peculiarly) seeks to replace *ren* with *jian ai*. But many passages in the *Mozi* celebrate *ren*. Thus, Mozi is confused or, even worse, inconsistent. Perhaps the view I present helps with this interpretive problem. *Ren* is very good, a high virtue; but it contains that germ of partiality, which can cause it to come undone. *Jian ai* does not possess the bad germ, and thus is a tad better in virtue of being morally more pure and more stable.
10. "Identifying with One's Superiors," pt. I, sec. II, p. 98.
11. David B. Wong, "Moism: The Founder, Mozi (Mo Tzu)," in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio S. Cua (London: Routledge, 2002), 453–61, at 453, my italics. Fraser this volume criticizes the claim that Mozi is a Voluntarist. Wong's claim might be read as that Mozi is a Rational Voluntarist. That is, action requires the discovery of truth by pure reason = "dispassionate intellect detached from emotion" (Rationalism) and then voluntarily doing what the truth requires (Voluntarism). I do not think the Stoics or Kant believed something this strong. And in any case, whatever else he is, Mozi was not a Stoic or a Kantian.
12. *Ibid.*, 460.
13. *Analects*, 1.2, 1.6.
14. David B. Wong, "Universalism versus Love with Distinctions: An Ancient Debate Revisited," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16, no. 3–4 (1989): 251–71, at 263. Wong does credit Mozi with calling attention to the fact that the Confucians do not give an adequate account of how familial love can be or will be spread beyond the family; and of pointing to certain dangers of narrow or chauvinistic familial love. Wong also makes it clear, despite calling Mozi a "proto-utilitarian," that Mozi's advocacy of *jian ai* is born of a sense of righteousness (*yi*).
15. Wong, "Moism," 454. Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). The four passages from Wong are representative of Mozi's press in the West. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003) is the best collection in English, and their introduction to Mozi is indicative of the generally unfavorable assessment of Mozi as a philosopher. Mozi introduced philosophical analysis to China, but the content of his thought is crass, thin, shallow, and the like. This view is widespread but false, and it is why the "Mozi Rehabilitation Project" is necessary.
16. "Universal Love," pt. III, sec. 16, *passim*. Sometimes—including in the passages where he laments "the present time" for the lack of *ren* models—Mozi makes the mistake of claiming that because impartiality is good all partiality is bad at the same time he celebrates filial sons.
17. *Ibid.*, 42.
18. Susan Hurley and Nick Charter, eds., *Perspectives on Imitation*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005). See especially essays by S. Hurley, G. Rizzolati, A. Meltzoff, and Ap Dijksterhaus. Imitation includes emulation, role modeling, speech and body language mimicry, memetic selection, and simulation of other minds.
19. Imitation leads to liking more than liking leads to imitation. Insofar as we are primed to imitate others, we are primed to like others.
20. Ap Dijksterhaus, "Why We Are Social Animals: The High Road to Imitation as Social Glue," in *Perspectives on Imitation*, ed. Susan Hurley and Nick Charter (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 207–20, at 217.
21. Professor Chung-ying Cheng wonders whether my interpretation of the cognitive scientific research on imitation depends on whether we conceive of virtue as actional or characterological, with Mozi aligned with the former and Confucius with the latter. My view is (i) that Mozi cannot be pinned so easily with the actional or behavioral conception of virtue, but (ii) in any case, the research shows that we will copy what is there to be copied, be it actions or more complex characterological schemas.
22. Hagop Sarkissian, "After Confucius: Psychology and Moral Power" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2008).

23. Sarkissian reads the *Analecets* as strongly suggesting that there is a critical number—perhaps not very small, but certainly not very large—which, thanks to a high compound rate of return on virtue, gets us to, or constitutes, a tipping point, after which virtue abounds and takes over.
24. *Analecets*, 9.14.
25. *Ibid.*, 1.9, 1.12; bk. 2 generally, especially, 2.1, 2.3, 2.13, 2.19–2.21; 4.25; 8.18; 12.1, 12.17–12.19; 13.6, 13.16; 15.5.
26. *Ibid.*, 4.6; 5.27; 6.22, 6.27; 7.3; 8.7, 8.13, 9.11, 9.19; 13.24; 15.6; 16.8.
27. *Ibid.*, 1.3, 15.11, 16.4; 17.13.
28. *Ibid.*, 9.18, 15.13.
29. “Against Offensive Warfare,” pt. III, sec. 19, p. 62.
30. “Universal Love,” pt. III, sec. 16, p. 50, my italics; see also “Against Offensive Warfare,” pt. III, sec. 19, p. 62.
31. Sarkissian writes (personal communication): “Given how the barbarian passage is presented, I take it that the barbarians will not be permanently changed by being exposed to a *junzi*. Rather, they will be transformed *in their presence*. So I don’t think Confucius is committed to the stronger claim.” But this is obviously a matter of interpretation, not settled by the text.
32. Watson, “Honoring the Worthy,” pt. I, sec. 9, pp. 23, 32, 34.
33. Weixiang Ding, this issue.
34. For example, *Analecets*, 1.2, 1.6. I don’t think Confucians could have bumper stickers that say “Think globally, act locally,” without conceding the developmental and conceptual priority of familial loyalty to all other kinds of loyalty. But they could have bumper stickers that say: “Act locally, the globe will take care of itself.” Well that’s too long for a bumper sticker, but you get the idea.
35. Weixiang Ding, this issue.
36. Franklin Perkins, this issue.
37. Is it really correct to think that all differences in this debate involve only means and not ends? I doubt that it is. One might hold plausibly than *ren* that comes about by brainwashing or coercion is not really *ren*; or that *zhi* enforced by a frightening state is not the kind of *zhi* one was aiming for. When a homonym, e.g., the Confucian and the Moist use *zhi*, and we want to mark that it is, or might be a different concept, we can write *yi^{Analecets}* or *yi^{Mozi}* as needed. For purposes of this article, I act—as Mozi often (but not always) does—as if he and Confucius have the same end in mind, and where he claims that Confucian ways, means, and methods will not gain that mutually desired end, or worse, will bring its opposite, say, *bie* or *bu ren* and *bu zhi*.
38. Everything I say here is compatible with Chad Hansen’s thesis in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), that classical Chinese logic is heavily performative, not purely propositional. Indeed, my whole point is that the dialectic between Mozi and Confucius is best read as involving stakes that involve performative challenges—challenges about whether Confucian theory and practice are consistent.
39. “Models and Standards,” bk. 1, chap. 4, p. 7. This section is not in Watson. See Y. Mei, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse* (London: Probsthain, 1929), 14.
40. Eric Hutton, “Does Xunzi Have a Consistent Theory of Human Nature?” in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, ed. T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 226. For a slightly weaker variation, see Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001), 56.
41. Alvin Goldman’s *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) is one of the first and the best books to apply the lessons of cognitive psychology systematically to help us understand and thereby overcome some common pitfalls of intuitive logic. In Flanagan, op cit., I tried to do the same for ethical reasoning by exposing the wide array of motivated and unmotivated, purely cognitive, ways we mess up ethically.