

# 4 Anticipating global justice

## Confucianism and Mohism in Classical China

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### Introduction

Two striking and conflicting trends mark our current global social order. The first trend is tied to the dramatic technological advancements that have facilitated profound economic, communicative, and political integration and interdependence between members of the global population. These forces of globalization have led to the emergence of, and deepening philosophical interest in, the ideals of global justice and cosmopolitanism. At the level of practice and institutions, there has been, in the last several decades, the continued development and elaboration of international organizations and norm-setting bodies that function to structure, organize, and regulate global economic, technological, and political activity.

At the same time, in the face of the forces of globalization and the emergence of the ideals of global justice and cosmopolitanism, we also observe, more recently, a second trend in the rise of nationalistic, anti-globalist, more traditional political outlooks. In the politics across the US, Western Europe, and Latin America, we find growing intolerance of non-citizens, rejection of globalist ideals and concerns, and the re-emergence of authoritarian political leaders. Many such leaders have come into power by riding waves of populist, nationalist, and anti-globalist sentiment. We see politicians win elections on the basis of campaigns organized around the notion that those who have been in power have illegitimately subordinated their countries' best interests for those of foreigners. And we see newly elected leaders call for the upending of a range of large-scale international efforts: a collective defense system such as NATO; political-economic arrangement like the European Union; and financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.

Among the many issues raised by these conflicting global and nationalistic tendencies are a variety of questions about the source, content, and scope of our moral and political responsibilities. One particularly pressing question we face in the current political climate is that of how we should conceive of our own moral and political responsibilities to diverse classes of people: to our children and families, to our friends and neighbors, to our fellow

citizens, and, of course, to those large numbers of people who “live beyond the borders”—fellow human beings and members of the global community.

My aim in this chapter is to suggest that this question and set of concerns about how we should conceive of our own moral and political responsibilities to different people near and far is not necessarily a new one and that it appears in an earlier form in the classical philosophical debates of the pre-Qin or Warring States era of Classical China. This is the historical period demarcated roughly as the time between the death of Confucius in 479 B.C. to the founding of the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.

In recent years, scholars have begun to reflect on whether, and how, Classical Chinese philosophical perspectives bear on contemporary discussions of justice. For example, Joseph Chan has argued that pre-Qin Chinese societies share with other societies characteristics that, according to contemporary theorists, give rise to circumstances of social justice. In particular, he argues that the philosophical writings of the Confucian figures Mencius and Xunzi can be understood as a response to social justice “issues such as poverty, differentiation of social roles and functions, inequality of income and status, and the distributive role of government” (Chan 2009, 269). Discussions such as Chan’s have, however, focused principally on *social* (or *domestic*) justice and have not examined the possible bearing of these perspectives on discussions of *global* (or *international*) justice.

In what follows, I want direct attention to the theoretical affinities between some Classical Chinese philosophical perspectives and contemporary discussions of *global* justice. More specifically, I shall suggest that the debates between the Confucians and Mohists – followers of the teachings of Confucius and Mozi, representing the two most prominent schools of thought during the Classical period – about what we owe to others mirror and anticipate aspects of debates in contemporary moral and political philosophy concerning our responsibilities to other people and concerning the proper scope of application of norms of justice. In making apparent parallels between debates and strands of thought in Classical Chinese thought, on the one hand, and recent Western philosophical discussions of cosmopolitanism and global justice, on the other, my hope is that scholars in the Chinese (and, more widely, East Asian) traditions will begin to take greater interest in the philosophical issues of global justice.

### Confucians and Mohists on *Ren* 仁

My point of entry is *ren* 仁, a central ethical notion in Classical Chinese thought. The term has been translated variously as “benevolence,” “humaneness,” and “goodness.” Kwong-loi Shun writes that there are at least two different views concerning the root meaning of the character *ren*. According to one view of *ren*, “the character originally referred to the quality that makes someone a distinctive member of an aristocratic clan.” According to a different view, “it originally had the meaning of love, especially the kindness of

rulers to their subjects” (Shun 2002, 53). What is important for our purposes is not necessarily which view is correct but that, on both widely accepted views, *ren* is used to refer to a desirable ethical ideal or quality.

Though both Confucians and Mohists treat *ren* as a central ethical ideal, they offer interestingly different interpretations of it. Even among Confucians, there exists somewhat varying interpretations of the term. In the *Analects*, it is sometimes described alongside other desirable qualities, such as wisdom and courage (*Analects* 9.29; 14.4; 14.28). But in the same work, *ren* is also sometimes described as involving other desirable qualities such as feelings of love or affection for fellow human beings (*Analects* 12.22). Elsewhere in the work, *ren* is referred to as the consummation of personal ethical excellence. For example, “A man who finds benevolence attractive cannot be surpassed” 好仁者，無以尚之 (*Analects* 4:6; Lau 1979, 72–73).

A distinctive feature of the Confucian understanding of *ren* is that it is taken to involve “graded compassion” (i.e., compassion that should be stronger for family members than for strangers). For example, “The feeling of compassion is the sprout of benevolence” 惻隱之心，仁之端也 (*Mencius* 2A6; Van Norden 2008, 47); “Treating one’s parents as parents is benevolence. ... There is nothing else to do but extend [this] to the world” 親親，仁也 ... 無他，達之天下也 (*Mencius* 7A15; Van Norden 2008, 175). Against this interpretation of *ren*, the Mohists – who were critical of Confucian thought – interpreted *ren* to mean “universal love” (i.e., equal compassion for each human): “It is the business of the benevolent man to try to promote what is beneficial to the world and to eliminate what is harmful” 仁人之事者，必務求興天下之利，除天下之害 (*Mozi* 16; Watson 2003, 41).

The contrasting interpretations of *ren* by the Confucians and Mohists manifests the deep tension that exists between the Confucian ethical view that recommends *graded* love or compassion and the Mohist ethical view that recommends *universal* love or compassion. I want to now elaborate on this tension before going on to suggest that it anticipates aspects of debates in contemporary moral and political philosophy concerning our responsibilities to other people.

### Confucians on “graded love”

The role of the family and the ideal of filial piety are absolutely central in Confucian ethics. The centrality of the family is brought out in the importance placed on Confucian rituals such as ancestor worship and mourning practices. As David Wong has noted, the prominence of the family is one of Confucianism’s most distinctive features (Wong 2008). Similarly, Yu-Wei Hsieh writes that “one can hardly understand Chinese ethics, and to some extent even Chinese political activities, if he cannot grasp the true import of this filial doctrine with its practical application in Chinese society” (Hsieh 1967, 167).

Part of the reason why Confucians placed such importance on the family is because they appreciated the role of the family in moral education and

development. For the Confucians, one's ethical concerns, dispositions, values, and priorities are developed out of, and shaped by, one's family. As Mencius says, "Among babes in arms there are none that do not know how to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers" 孩提之童，無不知愛其親者，及其長也，無不知敬其兄也 (*Mengzi* 7A15; Van Norden 2008, 175). He also says that the "beginning of *yi* 義" – translated as "meaning," "significance," "righteousness," "rightness," "right," "principle," "integrity," and sometimes "just" or "justice" – is among the "four sprouts" that constitute the good dispositions (*xing* 性) human beings are born with (*Mencius* 2A6; 6A6; 7A21). The Confucian idea that part of the importance of the family resides in its role in moral education and development anticipates the more recent notion found in the *communitarian* view in contemporary philosophy that people's social identity – their sense of what's good and valuable and worthwhile in life – comes from their links to a particular place.

Notably, the Confucians conceived of the family not in egalitarian but in hierarchical terms. In traditional Confucianism, wives are understood to be subordinate to husbands, children are subordinate to their parents, and younger siblings are subordinate to elder siblings. Individuals within a family thus find themselves fitting into certain relationship-roles, and attached to these roles are certain responsibilities, obligations, expectations, and benefits. For example, parents and elder siblings have responsibilities to nurture and take care of the younger members of the family; the younger members, in turn, are expected to be devoted and obedient.

The centrality of the family in Confucianism is connected to the specific Confucian doctrine of *graded love or compassion* (sometimes also referred to as *differentiated caring*), which I earlier mentioned. According to this doctrine, one should have greater concern for those who are bound to one by special relationships, such as those between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends. This doctrine is brought out in the following famous passage from the *Analecets*:

葉公語孔子曰：「吾黨有直躬者，其父攘羊，而子證之。」孔子曰：「吾黨之直者異於是。父為子隱，子為父隱，直在其中矣。」

The Duke of She said to Confucius, "Among my people there is one we call 'Upright Gong.' When his father stole a sheep, he reported him to the authorities."

Confucius replied, "Among my people, those we consider 'upright' are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. 'Uprightness' is to be found in this".

(*Analecets* 13:18; Slingerland 2003, 147)

From a purely impartial perspective, it seems that one is required to treat the thieving father as any other person and so to report the person to the authorities. However, Confucius praises the son who "covers up" for the

thieving father in this case, suggesting that there is virtue in treating differentially, on the basis of the special relationship that might (or might not) obtain between one and the other person.

We find a similar example in the *Mencius*. In one passage (7A35), Mencius is presented with the following hypothetical case: Suppose that the father of the venerated sage king Shun were to commit murder, would Shun use his power to shield his father from prosecution? Mencius claims that Shun could neither allow his father to stand trial nor actively block his prosecution. Instead, Shun would abdicate the throne and secretly flee to the coast with his father, living out his years in happiness and without regret. Elsewhere (5A3), Mencius approves of Shun granting his morally deprived brother a fief and enriching him because doing so discharged Shun's filial obligation to enoble his own family.

Roger Ames and David Hall have raised the worry that Confucianism, with its "graduated love and responsibility" and "intense family loyalties" might lead inevitably to provincialism and parochialism. They write that "Chinese culture has traditionally been plagued with abuses that arise because of the fine line that keeps social order beginning at home separate from nepotism, personal loyalties from special privilege, deference to excellence from elitism, appropriate respect from graft" (Hall and Ames 1987, 308).

For the Confucians, then, one has greater obligations toward those who are bound to oneself by community, friendship, and especially kinship. In addition to these greater moral obligations, one should also have stronger emotional attachment to those to whom one bears a special relationship. I believe the Confucian idea of "graded love" bears interesting relations to the contemporary moral philosophical idea of associative or special duties: duties that the members of significant social groups and the participants in close personal relationships have toward one another.

### Mohists on impartial concern (*jian'ai* 兼愛)

Against the Confucian outlook, Mozi argued that the ritual practices that the Confucians emphasized as importantly tied to fulfilling one's family obligations were often pointless and economically wasteful. Mozi rejected the Confucian doctrine of "graded love," advocating instead the doctrine of *impartial concern* or *universal love* (*jian'ai* 兼愛). The doctrine of impartial concern holds that one ought to be concerned for the welfare of people in a spirit of "impartial concern" that does not make distinctions between self and other, associates and strangers. According to the doctrine of impartial concern, one should have equal concern for all. That is, the doctrine asks people to love the family members of others as much as they love their own family members. Moreover, the doctrine holds that one has equal moral obligations to all. That is, one is morally obligated to promote the welfare of every person, regardless of any special relation a person might have with oneself.

There are, of course, more and less demanding readings of the doctrine of impartial concern. On the very demanding end of the spectrum, the doctrine might be interpreted to require people to strive to benefit strangers to the same extent as they benefit themselves and their loved ones. There is a good question here whether this view can be completely coherent, as there may be certain forms of benefit that depend on the existence of differential treatment between self and loved ones, on the one hand, and others and strangers, on the other. On the less demanding end, the doctrine might be interpreted only to require that people refrain from harming others and strangers to the same extent in which they avoid harms to themselves and their loved ones. An intermediate reading, which Hui-chieh Loy has suggested, holds that people ought (to seek) to help strangers with urgent needs as much as they do associates and themselves (Loy 2013, 487).

The Mohists argued for the doctrine by appealing to considerations of “Heaven’s Will” as well as “good consequences of the world.” That is, they justified the doctrine of impartial concern on the grounds that it realizes Heaven’s Will and that it furthers peace and promotes welfare of the world. Indeed, the Mohists argued that people’s failure to live up to the doctrine is the source of the world’s social problems and conflicts. For the Mohists, it is the tendency to act *partially* – the tendency to act on the basis of a greater regard for their own interests and the interests of their loved ones, over that of strangers (non-intimates) – that accounts for the widespread fact that people benefit themselves and their loved ones at the expense of strangers. In other words, the partiality at the root of the Confucian outlook is the source of social ills, and the doctrine of “impartial concern” has the potential to reverse the social ills if (enough) people adopt it.

### Cosmopolitanism and global responsibility

I want to now develop the suggestion that the Mohist *jian'ai* doctrine can be understood as a forerunner to the contemporary conceptions of cosmopolitanism and global justice. The English term *cosmopolitanism* comes from the Greek word *kosmopolites*, which means citizen of the cosmos, of the world. The core idea of cosmopolitanism is the idea that each individual is a citizen of the world, and owes allegiance, as Martha Nussbaum has put it, “to the worldwide community of human beings” (Nussbaum 2002, 4).

Although many contemporary theorists have put forward views that they describe as cosmopolitan, there is some divergence in the content of these views, as well as in their subject matter. To some people, cosmopolitanism is primarily a view about *sovereignty*. To others, it is primarily a view about *culture* and *identity*. To many philosophers, however, it is primarily a view about *justice*, and in recent years, there has been a proliferation of philosophical work on the topic of “global justice.” Global justice theorists usually distinguish between *political* and *moral* cosmopolitanism.<sup>1</sup> Political

cosmopolitanism is the view that political communities should not be territorially limited in their scope or that supranational political institutions are legitimate bearers of political authority. Moral cosmopolitanism is the view that our conception of global justice must accommodate the fundamental belief that all human beings are of equal moral importance. What all of these views have in common – what makes them cosmopolitan views – is the notion that any adequate political conception for our time must in some way comprehend the world as a whole.

For the cosmopolitan, it is appropriate to raise questions about justice on a world scale, taking into account all human beings and populations in the world. However, very few philosophers have advocated for the development of the kind of global state that would give the idea of “world citizenship” literal application.<sup>2</sup> Still, the thought of one as a citizen of the world is supposed to make a *political difference* in transforming one’s understanding of the normative significance of one’s particular interpersonal relationships and group affiliations. For the cosmopolitan about justice, the idea of world citizenship means that the norms of justice must ultimately be seen as governing the relations of all human beings to each other and not merely as applying within individual societies or bounded groups of other kinds. For the cosmopolitan, we are all collectively responsible for one another: the world itself represents a sort of single moral community.

The thought that one is fundamentally a citizen of the world may lead one to the thought that there is no legitimate moral basis for preferring the desires and interests of the people nearest to one to those who might need one’s help who are located far away. That is, one might think that there may be no justifiable reason to prioritize the needs and concerns of family and compatriots over strangers in distant parts of the world who may be living in poverty and suffering from malnutrition. Indeed, the contemporary philosopher Peter Singer argues that what a responsible citizen of the world should do is take seriously that all human needs matter.<sup>3</sup> For Singer, people in developed countries have a responsibility – a demanding obligation – to help poor people in developing countries on a general principle of responsiveness to neediness as such, regardless of one’s relationship to the global poor. Considering the prevalence of extreme poverty in the world and the amount of preventable suffering and death, the affluent have a moral obligation to provide aid to the poor irrespective of whether they are compatriots or foreigners. Radically, this would involve some of the people in the West giving most of their wealth and income to charity organizations such as Oxfam and UNICEF to save people’s lives, particularly those suffering from severe poverty, disease, and malnutrition (Singer 1972; Unger 1996).<sup>4</sup>

There are interesting parallels that can be drawn between Singer’s utilitarian-based cosmopolitanism and Mohism, with its consequentialist orientation and commitment to the *jian’ai* doctrine. Indeed, one way in

which this is brought out is in the fact that both Singer and the Mohists defend a very demanding conception of morality.

嘿則思，言則誨，動則事，使三者代御，必為聖人。必去喜，去怒，去樂，去悲，去愛，而用仁義。手足口鼻耳，從事於義，必為聖人。

When silent, ponder; when speaking, instruct; when acting, work. Make these three alternate and surely you will be a sage. You must eliminate happiness and eliminate anger, eliminate joy and eliminate sorrow, eliminate fondness and eliminate dislike, and use benevolence and righteousness. Your hands, feet, mouth, nose, and ears undertaking righteousness, surely you will be a sage.

(*Mozi* 47; Fraser 2015)

As the passage brings out, the Mohists emphasize a life of complete devotion to moral duty, where this means that one may have to eliminate happiness, joy, and fondness. For the Mohists, if satisfying basic material needs is sufficient to secure our welfare, then once those needs are met, we have little worthwhile to do but help others.

There is also much in common between the Mohist argument for the *ji-an'ai* doctrine and Singer's argument that our duties to others should not be determined by their proximity to us. Both the Mohists, on the one hand, and Singer, on the other, argue that simply because some people are geographically or psychologically distant from one, their needs should not matter less to us than those that are not distant. In other words, our duties to strangers across the globe are just as weighty and stringent as those to our loved ones, family members, and neighbors.

We can contrast the cosmopolitan perspective on global justice with what I shall call a *traditional* perspective. This perspective holds that individuals have greater moral responsibilities toward certain members of the global population than toward others. More precisely, the traditional view holds that the norms of justice apply primarily within bounded social groups comprising some subset of the global population. These social groups are bounded by some shared common history, culture, language, or ethnicity. For the traditionalist, then, there are limits to the scope of an individual's moral responsibilities, and an individual's responsibilities do not hold equally to all others in the world. Insofar as the Confucians adhere to the doctrine of "graded love," we can think of them as being traditionalists.

Against the traditionalists, the cosmopolitans hold a more expansive conception of individual responsibility. Cosmopolitans oppose the notion that there should be principled restrictions on the scope of an adequate conception of justice. They oppose the traditional view that the principles of distributive justice can properly be applied only within sufficiently cohesive social groups: groups that share a common history, culture, language, or



ethnicity. Insofar as the Mohists advocate instead the doctrine of *impartial concern* or *universal love* (*jian'ai*), we can think of them as being cosmopolitans of a sort.

### **Cosmopolitanism and partiality**

One way to consider the issue between the cosmopolitan and the traditionalists is in terms of the following question: what kinds of normative reasons can one have for devoting special concern to those individuals with whom one has special relationships consisting in co-membership in a group bounded by shared common history, culture, language, or ethnicity? For the cosmopolitan, one's status as a world citizen has to be seen as in some sense fundamental. But does this mean, then, that directing special concern to those in one's group is necessarily morally unjustified for the cosmopolitan?

One way to answer this question assumes that if such special concern is to be morally justified, it has to be justified on the basis of the ideal of world citizenship itself. This is the view that Martha Nussbaum defends. Nussbaum writes that “[n]one of the major thinkers in the cosmopolitan tradition denied that we can and should give special attention to our own families and to our own ties of religious and national belonging.” According to Nussbaum, cosmopolitans believe “that it is right to give the local an additional measure of concern” and “the primary reason a cosmopolitan should have for this is not that the local is better per se, but rather that this is the only sensible way to do good” (Nussbaum 2002, 135–136).

One reading of Nussbaum's thought is that if each of us devotes our special attention to our own children, this is the most effective way of apportioning our benevolence and more effective than if each of us directly attempts to divide our attention equally among all the children of the world. But in devoting special attention to our own children, we must not suppose that our own children are more worthy of attention than other children. In other words, special attention to particular people is morally defensible since, and only because, it can be justified by reference to the interests of all human beings considered as equals. Cosmopolitanism, then, implies that particular human relationships and group affiliations never provide independent reasons for action or suffice by themselves to generate special responsibilities to one's intimates and associates.

A different understanding of the cosmopolitan view of special concern is to hold that, in addition to one's relationships and affiliations with particular individuals and groups, one also stands in an ethically significant relation to other human beings in general in virtue of being a citizen of the world. This view does *not* imply that one's special relationships and affiliations need to be justified by reference to the ideal of world citizenship itself or that any legitimate reasons we have for promoting the interests of the people we care specially about must be derivative from the interests

of humanity as a whole. Instead, world citizenship is one important form of membership among others, one important source of reasons and responsibilities among others. Cosmopolitanism, on this more moderate interpretation, insists only that one's local attachments and affiliations must always be balanced and constrained by consideration of the interests of other people.

If we are to think of Mohists as a kind of early cosmopolitans, it is not clear which of the two understandings of cosmopolitan special concern that I have just outlined fits in with the Mohists more closely. One the one hand, the Mohist *jian'ai* doctrine – that each of us should be motivated impartially by equal concern for all regardless of one's relationship to them and that one's behavior conforms to the standard of “regarding others as though regarding oneself” – shares with supposition in the first cosmopolitan interpretation described above that the interests of all human beings should be considered as equal and that one's own children are no more worthy of attention than other children. On the other hand, the Mohists believed that one's local attachments and affiliations (such as family members and loved ones) must always be balanced and constrained by consideration of the interests of other people. In taking seriously the interests of those non-intimates that are in need in this way, the Mohists have something in common with the second cosmopolitan interpretation.

### Rawls and global justice

In the previous section, I described the issue between the cosmopolitan and the traditionalist in terms of *justice*: Is there anything that the members of an individual society owe each other, as a matter of justice, that they do not owe to non-members? Here, the concept of justice is a distributive notion, concerning how benefits and burdens should be distributed to members (of a society, of the world population) according to certain normative principles. The disagreement between cosmopolitan advocates of global justice and advocates of more traditional, anti-globalist views of justice might also be framed in terms of the proper scope of the principles of justice in the individual society or the world as a whole.

Since much of the terms of the contemporary global justice debate – the debate concerning whether norms of justice apply only within an individual society or to the world as a whole – comes out of responses to John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, it will be useful to discuss briefly some of the main ideas of Rawls's theory. In the opening pages of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls claimed that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (Rawls 1971, 3). In making this claim, Rawls elevated the concept of justice above other important political ideas such as liberty, law, equality, power, rights, obligation, security, democracy, and the state. For Rawls, justice is the paramount virtue of social institutions in that whatever other virtues such institutions might possess, they are

unacceptable if unjust. For example, a society might be wealthy and stable, but these attributes count for naught if those institutions are unjust.

The role of justice is to define “the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of cooperation” (Rawls 1971, 4). The primary subject of justice, according to Rawls, is the “basic structure” of society: “the way in which major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation” (Rawls 1971: 6). One source of the idea that the principles of distributive justice should be extended to the global level comes out of responses to Rawls’s emphasis on “the basic structure of society” as the primary subject of justice. By “the basic structure of society,” Rawls refers to a society’s major social, political, and economic institutions. One of the reasons why Rawls focused almost exclusively on the basic structure in developing his two principles of justice is because he appreciated its deep role in shaping people’s life prospects, including how well or poorly they fare economically. Some proponents of global justice (but, importantly, not Rawls himself) have argued that the increasingly complex global economy also has a deep impact on the lives and prospects of people worldwide and that it is therefore essential that institutions and bodies that ground the rules of the economy should be regulated by principles of justice (Pogge 2008).<sup>5</sup>

Rawls argued that distribution of wealth and income in society is unjust if they are unduly determined by “morally arbitrary” factors, such as whether one is born into an affluent or poor family. Some proponents of global justice have argued that there exist enormous disparities in wealth in different societies in the world and that some of these disparities stem from factors, such as differences in countries’ natural resource endowments, which are at least as morally arbitrary as the factors that Rawls identified. It is also morally arbitrary whether someone happens to be born in an affluent society or a poor one – the country of one’s birth is not something morally deserved or merited. Thus, these proponents of global justice (which do not include Rawls himself) argue that, if it is unjust to have the distribution of income and wealth within a society be unduly influenced by morally arbitrary factors, then it is also unjust to have the global economic distribution be influenced by such factors.<sup>6</sup>

I have been focusing in particular on two Rawlsian ideas that have played important roles in the development of the cosmopolitan position in global justice discussion. The first idea is that the “primary subject of justice” is the “basic structure” of an individual society, which comprises a society’s major social, political, and economic institutions. The second idea is that a just society cannot permit the distribution of income and wealth to be influenced by morally arbitrary factors such as people’s native abilities or the social circumstances into which they are born. I want to now discuss the commonalities between these Rawlsian ideas that have been influential in developing the cosmopolitan position on global justice, on the one hand, and ideas in Confucian and Mohist thought, on the other. More specifically, I shall make

two claims: (1) that the rationale for the Confucians emphasis on the family in their ethical outlook has something in common with Rawls emphasis on the basic structure of society in his theory of justice and (2) that the Mohist *jian'ai* doctrine has something in common with the argument, made by some cosmopolitans, that national boundaries are morally arbitrary from the standpoint of justice made. I shall take these two points in turn.

First, recall that for Rawls, principles of distributive justice apply to not the global distribution of income and wealth as a whole but rather the basic structure of each society taken one at a time. Some cosmopolitans have objected to Rawls by arguing that something like his theory of distributive justice should apply globally. Rawls's main reason for focusing on the basic structure is because its effects in shaping people's life prospects are so profound. Individuals born into different social positions have different expectations in life, some of them more favorable than others. Rawls appreciated that a social system shapes deeply people's desires, aspirations, and expectations. It shapes the kinds of persons they are and want to be.

There is a way in which the Confucian normative emphasis on the family is broadly similar to Rawls's emphasis on the basic structure, in that both emphases derive from an appreciation of what is taken to be among the most central social structures in shaping human lives: the family in the Confucian case, the individual (non-global) society in Rawls's case. That is, I believe this Rawlsian emphasis on the application of the norms of justice to the basic structure given the immense role it plays in shaping people's lives has something in common with the Confucian concern with the family, as the Confucians too applied norms of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) to the family, on the grounds that the family played a formative role in shaping people's desires, aspirations, expectations, and character. Just as Rawlsians believe that the basic structure should be regulated by a conception of justice, given the significant role it plays in shaping people's lives, Confucians believe that the family ought to be regulated by norms of ritual propriety, given the significant role that it plays in shaping people's lives.<sup>7</sup>

Second, recall that for Rawls, a just society cannot permit the distribution of income and wealth to be influenced by morally arbitrary factors such as people's native abilities or the social circumstances into which they are born. Some cosmopolitans have drawn on this Rawlsian idea of moral arbitrariness to argue that national boundaries are equally arbitrary from the standpoint of justice: as a matter of justice, the accident of where one is born should have no effect on one's economic prospects.

I believe Rawls's appeal to the idea of moral arbitrariness in the individual society – an idea that some advocates of global justice have tried to extend to the whole as a whole – has something in common with the Mohists *jian'ai* doctrine. Recall, that the *jian'ai* doctrine holds that one ought to be concerned for the welfare of people in a spirit of “impartial concern” that does not make distinctions between self and other, associates and strangers. At the root of the Mohist thought that people ought to have concern for

their own family members as well as non-family members is a recognition of the moral arbitrariness of social distance. For the Mohist, every person's welfare matters, regardless of any special relation a person might have with oneself, and for many contemporary philosophers, appreciation of just this idea has been one important path toward the development of a concern with global justice.

## Conclusion

To summarize, I have argued that the philosophical question about how we should understand our moral and political responsibilities to different people is not necessarily a new one and that it has appeared in an earlier form in the philosophical debates between the Confucians and Mohists. In striking respects, their debates about our obligations to others mirror and anticipate aspects of debates in contemporary Western analytic philosophy about our responsibilities to other people and about the proper scope of application of norms of justice.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

- 1 On this distinction, see Beitz (2005).
- 2 One who has is Luis Cabrera, who makes a moral argument for world government. See Cabrera (2014).
- 3 Singer's argument relies on two premises. The first is that affluent individuals should contribute a much greater proportion of their resources to aid those who are suffering from poverty, disease, and malnutrition. The second is that all individuals have far-reaching duties to prevent harm and alleviate suffering.
- 4 It is worth noting that utilitarian or consequentialist cosmopolitanism of the sort advocated by Singer is not widely defended in the global justice debate, for many global theorists ground their views on non-consequentialist assumptions. For an overview of current cosmopolitan trends, see Caney (2010).
- 5 Rawls famously insisted that his principles of justice be applied solely to the basic structure of an individual society rather than to the world as a whole.
- 6 My discussion of Rawls's work may suggest that he neglected issues of global justice. It would be unfair and inaccurate to draw this conclusion, despite the fact that he explicitly rejected the notion of applying his principles of distributive justice globally. Instead, Rawls argued that relations among societies are governed by the "law of peoples" (Rawls 2001). The law of peoples sets out principles of justice to govern international relations, but they are not principles of distributive justice. In other words, they do not concern themselves with the distribution of income and wealth per se but instead presuppose the existence of separate societies within which distributive principles do apply. In his discussion of the law of peoples, Rawls claims that wealthier societies have a duty to assist what he calls "burdened societies."
- 7 Interestingly, Rawls himself did not take the family to be part of the basic structure. For discussion of the proper "site" of distributive justice, see the discussion between Gerald A. Cohen (1997), Liam Murphy (1998), and Thomas Pogge (2000). For feminist criticisms of Rawls's exclusion of the family from the basic structure, see Okin (1994).

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