

analysis that takes account of the social concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and the ways in which it limits individual agency. This unwillingness to confront negative evidence, together with Brindley's strategy of redefining "individualism" to fit what she finds in early China rather than enquiring whether what she finds in early China fits any commonly accepted definition of the term, undercuts her conclusions rather severely.

Nevertheless, Brindley does succeed in her larger enterprise of showing that individual persons in early China possessed the capacity for agency—that is, that they were capable of forming views and acting upon them, not always in conformity with the wishes of social, political, and religious institutions and groups. They were not in thrall to fate; Mozi's critique of *ming* had traction. The common stereotype of Chinese people waiting passively for whatever fate has in store for them is manifestly false and derogatory. Ordinary people in early China were not cattle (though their rulers might sometimes have wished them to be); if nothing else they were capable of following Mencius's advice to flee an ill-governed state in search of a well-governed one. The benefits of learning and of self-cultivation were increasingly available across class barriers, and it was not just in exemplary stories that some individuals rose from the ranks of the peasantry or the artisanal class to reach the highest rungs of the social ladder.

Brindley also accomplishes her goal of complicating the contemporary debate on human rights and Asian values. Even if there was less "individualism" in early China than she would like to see there, she raises some very tough questions for those who would argue that East Asians, by "nature" or by preference, see the world as members of groups rather than as individual human beings who are quite capable of asserting agency on their own. She shows quite clearly that arguments in favour of limiting human rights for contemporary Asians on the basis of supposed classical traditions are specious—and that is an important accomplishment.

Though I have raised questions about some of the arguments and conclusions in this book, overall I read it with interest and appreciation. It makes a genuine contribution to the ongoing effort to understand early Chinese debates on the nature of human nature, the concept of the self, and the role of the individual in society.

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The Mozi: A Complete Translation. Translated and annotated by Ian Johnston. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Pp. lxxxv + 944. \$85.00.

This very welcome resource provides its own best motivation. Ian Johnston observes that the *Mozi* "embodied . . . the most serious challenge to the increasing dominance of Confucianism. It did this by presenting a coherent body of doctrine articulated in a

strikingly systematic way” (p. xvii). “Despite this richness of content,” he continues, “the *Mozi* has been a sadly neglected work, both in China itself over two millennia, and in the West since early Chinese philosophy first became a subject of significant interest in the 19th century” (pp. xvii–xviii).

Johnston goes a long way toward his goal to “redress this neglect” by translating, annotating, and commenting on the entire text. Readily available translations are mostly partial, in part, because the text often contains repetitions—most significantly in the core doctrines which have up to three overlapping versions—sections whose authenticity is questioned, and sections of challenging textual difficulty and theoretical complexity. There have been almost complete translations from the first generation of translators (Alfred Forke and Y. P. Mei 梅貽寶) practically a century ago.¹ These could not adequately take recent work done in reconstructing dialectical and analytic chapters by A. C. Graham following modern Chinese scholars in the wake of Sun Yirang’s 孫詒讓 breakthrough. Providing a translation of the entire text including this technical material, together with the original Chinese text, extensive annotation of both traditional and modern commentary and translation gives us a rich and weighty academic resource. (At 3.5 lb., it’s heavier than most laptops.)

The text includes a nice introduction to Mohism with well informed accounts of the various theories about Mozi himself and the nature of Mohism as a movement, about how the text was preserved and why traditional histories so ignored it. There is an illuminating and nuanced account of the theories about three different versions of the core texts, and an introductory commentary on the core chapters highlighting some of the differences between the different versions of each core doctrine. The text is an extremely useful research tool for those engaged in studying this large body of work.

The upshot is a very successful project—if that was Ian Johnston’s chief goal. But Johnston gives a powerful argument for a more ambitious goal. He argues in the introduction and even more strongly in his preface for translations that capture the philosophical significance of the Mohist movement, and probes more accurately the impressive philosophical achievements of the school thus promoting greater understanding and appreciation of Chinese philosophy as a whole. This might (a) encourage Western philosophy departments to incorporating more Chinese philosophy into their curriculum and (b) correct traditional sinology’s dismissal and neglect both of this school and philosophical foci of Chinese thought. The upshot should be an enhanced realization of the value of Classical China’s contribution to intellectual culture and the novel resources it offers for reflection on the philosophically fundamental questions of life and politics.

¹ Alfred Forke, *Mê Ti des Sozialethikers und seiner Schüler philosophische Werke* (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag der Vereinigung wissenschaftlicher Verleger, 1922); Yi-pao Mei, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse* (London: Probsthain, 1929).

Johnston vigorously and soundly targets traditional excuses for this lack of philosophical appreciation—complaints about a lack of stylistic mastery of Chinese and the inappropriateness of Mohist ideas for China. Johnston reveals his own journey to interest in the Mohism via his fascination with the ancient Chinese *School of Names*, sometimes alleged to be Chinese sophists, logicians, or semanticists. The texts of dialectical Mohism clearly offered the greatest depth of insight into this burst of ancient Chinese analytical thought. Johnston's section on the Mohist Canon and other analytical works (the greater and lesser pick) are among the most successful and important components of his project.

Part of the special worth of this section lies in his conscious attempt to provide an alternative to Graham's treatment, using insights from Chinese analysts in exploring these difficult chapters. As remarkable as Graham's accomplishment was, it represents, as Graham himself realized, a partly speculative attempt to bring coherence into these corrupt and difficult texts. Graham openly acknowledges his extended debt to a wide range of Chinese scholars (his convenient source abbreviation list occupies three pages). This provides Western readers with valuable access to a rich variety of interpretive hypotheses for this crucial analytic section—and for the rest of the text.

Johnston laments ironically that the length of the book forced him to drop his commentary on the other parts which constitute by far a larger component of his work. That lack is regrettable, because it may diffuse some of the few doubts this reviewer has about the value of the larger translation project. Two concerns loom.

First, an obvious surface worry—the book size. As I noted, it's heavier and more bulky than a laptop which could contain thousands of times the material and make it almost instantaneously searchable, provide access to analytic materials, rival interpretations, etc. In an age when books are already endangered a 4.5 inch thick book already seems like a throwback when websites (e.g. Donald Sturgeon's magnificent Chinese Text Project) that can offer better access to even more materials needed for doing interpretive analysis. So far, the site has not linked text and translations to commentary resources, but that seems the next step.

Consequently, as a resource for further research—where it is most successful—this book may not do as much as the effort and accomplishment warrant. One must admit, however, that reading books is still more satisfying than screens and having the text immediately at hand makes working with Johnston's resource a satisfying experience. I found myself going back and forth between the book and the website for my own analysis.

The flip-side of that worry, however, is that as an example of interpretive analysis, particularly considering his impassioned defense of the philosophical quality of the school and the importance of appreciating its distinctly philosophical contribution to Classical Chinese thought, the result is disappointing. The culprit here is Johnston's choice (defended at length in both the preface and introduction) to resist a wide range of proposals for more accurate lexical English equivalents of key Mohist terms made by recent philosophical interpreters. Johnston highlights this stance in defending his choice to

use old, traditional translations of several theoretically pivotal terms. The examples range from *jian ai* 兼愛 (universal love v. comprehensive concern) to *yi* 義 (righteousness v. morality or duty). Johnston opts not to accept the proposals claimed to better capture the meaning and inferential links within Mohist reasoning about ethics and politics, for example their objection to Confucian partiality, their utilitarianism, and later Mohist technical analysis and engagement with puzzles about *jian ai*.

In his most extended discussion of *jian*^{comprehensive} *ai*^{love: concern}, Johnston offers a battery of specific arguments along with two pivotal ones which seem to figure in all similar cases.

(1) He acknowledges that the arguments that the proposals are more accurate translations “have merit” but that no single alternative has “achieved widespread acceptance” or sometimes that the arguments for several alternatives to established translations are equally compelling. Unable on these grounds to choose between the new proposals, he opts for the old translation.

(2) He defends translation conservatism on grounds that (a) the older translations are “sanctioned by long use” (p. xlili) and that (b) conforming to translation practice helps the reader know which character is being translated.

The posture puzzles this reader. Why does an alleged tie (or lack of acceptance) of alternatives justify reverting to the arguably misleading traditional translation? I doubt the second line of reasoning shows his choice would help the reader understand either Mohist arguments or theories. Johnston quite consistently accepts traditional lexical Chinese-to-English translations and traditional accounts of Mohist reasoning and philosophical stance. For example, he regards “Universal Love” as “the cornerstone of Mohism,” simply quoting Li Shenglong 李生龍 who in turn cites “early works.” This traditionalism insulates his renderings from widespread criticism but perhaps at the cost of making it harder for the reader to see the point of the text.

Johnston does not separately defend his theoretical conservatism. He says, “Difficulties of terminology and translation notwithstanding, the arguments presented by Mo Zi . . . are quite clear,”—citing some (usually non-modern) authority on Mozi’s argument (p. xliiv). This suggests a picture on which the traditional lexical equivalents and traditional account of argument and theory are separate. It is not that Johnston’s translation is exactly like any traditional one. He picks and chooses among his authorities so his result is unique, but the justification is prior authority more often than appeal to achieving greater philosophical coherence.

The unemployed philosophical attempts to justify accurate translation and theory content, by contrast, reflect this generation’s having learned (from Quine et al.) that attribution of theories and arguments to thinkers and assigning meanings to their concepts are linked in a single process—radical translation. We choose and justify both as a single package. Choosing a translation manual entails (given the grammatical structure of the text) choosing to attribute certain assertions, arguments and theories to them and vice versa. Significantly, the modern philosophical arguments for the changes in translations of

lexical items he rejects, appeal to considerations of coherence of the sort that they believe will generate more favourable philosophical evaluation of the resulting arguments and theory.

Johnston works in what the translator's paradigm. He sees the role of the translator as rendering Chinese characters or phrases using *sanctioned* English terms or phrases then smoothing out the result into readable English. The English words come from a standard dictionary, previous translator practice, or traditional commentary. So Johnston's traditional translation practice wars with his passionate argument for why a full translation is needed—the traditional absence of philosophical understanding and sympathy with Mohism or the appreciation of its pivotal role in the classical philosophical dialectic. It entails that this translation, coming up on a century after Forke and Mei's translations, essentially reads the same old views back into the text.

By contrast, philosophical accounts of meaning based on the radical interdependence of translation and belief attribution, assign lexical translations together with grammatical theories which together yield a body of rationally coherent beliefs. Understanding how the *body* of assertions hangs together guides how we render sentences in English. That rendering supervenes on the lexical equivalences in the translation manual. As a matter of translation practice, Johnston dismisses proposals designed to bring out the insights gleaned from the dialectical chapters and ignored or unknown by traditional commentators.

He does not set out himself to capture the real inferential structure of a language in a way that reflects better our new appreciation of how well Mohists reasoned. He retains a traditional picture of theory and meaning *package* of traditional translations—the ones that underpin their manifest image of shallow, religious dilettantes. He, thus, effectively allows traditional belief in Mohism's philosophical shallowness and religious superstition to persist in the face of his own powerful recent evidence of the school's analytic sophistication. That seems to this reader to undermine his own case for giving a new translation of the parts Forke, Mei, and Watson have already translated.²

I emphasize, in fairness, that my disappointment is less directed at Johnston than against the professional self-conception of the translator. Johnston expresses it here in a familiar translators' shibboleth: "I have tried to strike a balance between accuracy and readability." The formulaic values in this motto are usually (a) presented without theoretical elaboration of *accuracy* and (b) taken to be in some kind of tension—as if one needs to be somewhat inaccurate to be readable. Prima facie, I cannot imagine what justification of this tension their *implicit* theory of accuracy would sustain. Translations of Chinese thought are frequently unreadable because of rigid use of traditional lexical or dictionary equivalents for each character with greater or lesser smoothing out to get the English result. Pragmatically, the accuracy criterion cashes out as "earlier translators/lexicographers have endorsed my *lexical* choices." Readability, Johnston's earlier argu-

² Burton Watson, *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

ment suggested, was also a function of using “familiar” lexical items so readers can place this next to earlier translations with “no doubt about which Chinese terms are being translated” (p. xiii).

The philosophical arguments for different translations *and* attributed theories is a theory about what the Chinese text *really* means, not about how to sacrifice *accuracy* to get philosophical sense. “Universal love” is inaccurate precisely because it does not capture the inferential links of that phrase in the structure of Mohist arguments for their conclusions. The traditional theoretical claim that “universal love is the core” of Mohist doctrine turns out to be inaccurate on exactly the same ground. When the inferential links are made clear, we will see utilitarianism at the core. Utility is maximized when everyone has comprehensive concern for others. It does not require that I have the emotional entanglement with billions of people, past and future, that I have with my wife and children!

I can best illustrate the difference between philosophical semantic analysis and the translation paradigm by looking at a particular case in the core dialogues. Take the triad titled “Shàng Tóng” 尚同 (Promoting Agreement). Johnston notes a puzzle about how “promoting unity” *comes to mean* “identification with the superior.” That “meaning” seems to cash out as “prior translators, e.g., Watson, Mei, have rendered this phrase as He then dismisses the “puzzle” as of little consequence since “the argument is entirely clear.” But revising the whole translation manual to capture the flow of Mohist argument should lead us to doubt the old, less appreciative, account of the argument. The argument should *become* clearer as we revise the translation. The result will be a better argument as well as one more transparently expressed in the text.

Summarizing the old argument, Johnston says “the standard comes from above whereas the conformity comes from below” and cites Schwartz and others who draw parallels with Hobbes’s “similar logic.” I presume readers are familiar with the Western parallel. The standard is posited law, originating from an absolute authority, backed by a monopoly on the right of punishment, and limited by nothing but the requirement to use that right to “keep the peace.” The state of nature arises from an assumption of psychological and moral egoism focused mainly on a natural right of self defense which the contract bequeaths to the absolute ruler for the guarantee of peace. Hobbes’s resulting legal positivism contrasts with the Western theory of natural rights and its rejection of “unjust laws” as invalid.

If that Hobbesian position is what the Mohist is arguing for in these three dialogues, it is an abysmally incoherent, meandering failure—nothing like the logical structure we find in Hobbes. Many missing steps makes Mohist reasoning look embarrassing *if they are Hobbesian authoritarians*. There is no compact, no egoism, no transfer of a right to punish, no allegation the ruler posits laws; discovering he lacks the power to enforce the missing laws, no setting up of police or courts. There is, in fact, no undisputed mention of laws at all. The discussion starts and ends with disagreement about and eventual agreement on 義 *yi* conceptions of good.

In its place is an interestingly *different* system, one for collecting, endorsing and/or rejecting the judgements of what has value gathered at each level, reaching and enforcing agreement on that. No philosopher could justify assigning these essays as ways of getting insight into Hobbes's theory of political legitimacy. Done right, however the argument could be useful in class as an example of an alternative way of conceiving of social order arising from something like a "state of nature." The argument can be made to look more or look less like that of Hobbes by choosing established lexical translations v. philosophically revisionist ones. I'll supply the latter for the sake of this argument—but won't attempt to justify them here.

Before there were (laws and punishment) v. (mutilations and coercive administration)
[version 1]

Changed in the versions 2 and 3 to (governing rulers) v. (rectifying elders)

People had different (principles, ideas) v. (moralities, conceptions of the good)

Leading to failure to share labour, tools, and useful ways (*dào*s) of doing things. This even may extend to disagreement within families, murder and fratricide.

Therefore, (Heaven) v. (the social world) chooses the best to be

(Son of Heaven) v. (natural master)

Who, asserting that the lacks the:

(power) v. (knowledge of ordinary people's perceptions of their conditions)—[See syntax discussion below.]

. . . appoints the next tier in the hierarchy, until a pyramid of wise people are in place. At which point everyone is asked to report what they regard as

(Good and evil) v. (good-at and not good-at)

(Good and evil) v. (good-at and disruptive/violent)

Then each level, receiving the reports endorses or rejects them and transmits the result to the next level where the process is repeated. After the natural master collects the penultimate judgements and endorses or rejects them, everyone proceeds to agree with and act on the resulting normative structure.

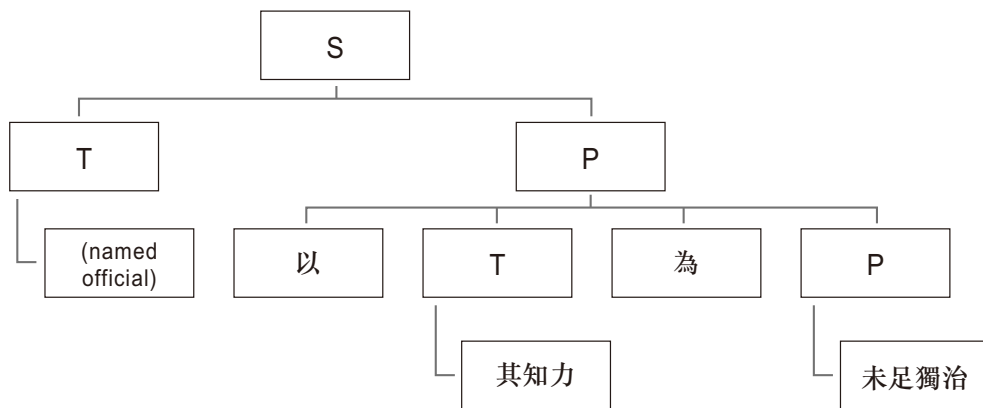
The good-at and people who identify them are rewarded by those above and praised by those below. The disruptive and violent and people who fail to participate in the system are

(punished) v. (sanctioned)

The old and new translation choices and old-new theory attribution appear equally to form an internal circle of reasoning, as Quine had suggested.

However, grammatical questions are relevant; one is flagged above. In the first version, each official, upon appointment, 以其力為未足 "regarding his *power* as not yet sufficient" picks the next wise tier explaining that in a world so vast, discriminating benefit and harm, right and wrong is too complicated. In the second version, the formula is changed to 以為唯其耳目之請 "regarded as relying only on perception of conditions using his eyes and ears" alone, he is unable In the third version the state of nature and appointment are preceded by a lengthy analysis of 治 *zhi*^{order}, theorizing that 上之為

政，得下之情則治 “if those above administer by obtaining the perceptions of their conditions of those below, then it counts as order.” Then the formulaic realization by each appointed level, justifying the appointment of an lower rung of the hierarchy, goes: (newly appointed office) 以其知力為未足獨治 *yi* regarding *qi* his *zhi* know *li* power *wei* as *wei* not-yet *zu* sufficient *du* alone *zhi* order (society under him) repeated for each level. In each case, Johnston follows older translators in rendering the phrase as “knew that his strength alone was not sufficient to bring order to the world” This fits the traditional assumed narrative of the ruler imposing his will on the people and it puts an English counterpart on each lexical item, but a radical translation manual with a consistent phrase structure for generating assertions from words, would not support that reading—which would be more naturally expressed in literary form as 知其力之未足獨治



This structure implies that officials at each level “regard their epistemic powers as insufficient . . .to order”—deictically referring to the just explicated conception of 治 *zhi* order—according with ordinary peoples’ perceptions of their conditions. The lexical, theoretical *package* is syntactically more precise.

Despite my complaint about the translator’s paradigm v. the philosopher’s analytic one, I hasten to re-emphasize that Johnston’s massive translation and marshalling of resources is a magnificent and valuable achievement. It is particularly useful to those of us who want to do this kind of further analysis of Mohist doctrines. It’s unfair, of course, to demand everything of such a comprehensive translation. It’s arguably not Johnston’s duty to make the translation a *good* candidate for use in a political philosophy class, though he does share the goal. Johnston’s practices here are those of his art—of the translator’s paradigm. His execution of this state of the traditional translator’s art, far from being deficient, is exemplary. No one anxious to proceed with the further task of analyzing Mohist philosophy should wait for the computerized version, even if it would be easier to manage on your Kindle.

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