

Mwòdž 17-19 非攻 “Against War”

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Abstract. The MZ 17-19 essays expound a well-known and characteristic tenet of Micianism. They share with MZ 14-16 the fact that each essay is twice the length of the preceding (successively 425, 1,172, and 2,016 words).¹ As a supplement to my previous studies,² I here consider the structure and rhetorical strategy of each essay, to show that (1) each is complete in itself, in further refutation of the fragment theory, and that (2) the series is developmental, in further refutation of the idea that they are parallel but geographically separate versions of the same thing.³

MZ 17 is a tightly argued three-part case. Each part begins with the hypothesis marker 今 “suppose.” The three parts prove that murder is wrong, extend that wrong to war, and denounce the morally confused persons who lead the state into war:

1. Establishing a Basis (Proving the immorality of killing)
 - a. Theft of fruit. Why is it wrong? It causes injury
 - b. Theft of food animals. Why is it wrong? It causes greater injury
 - c. Theft of draft animals. Why is it wrong? It causes still greater injury
 - d. Murder of a man. Why is it wrong? It causes yet greater injury
 Conclusion: Everyone agrees that these things are wrong
2. Extension (From killing 1 man to killing many men in war)
 - a. The wrong of killing 1 man
 - b. The 10 times greater wrong of killing 10 men
 - c. The 100 times greater wrong of killing 100 men
 Conclusion: The state praises killing many men in war
3. Accusation (The error of moral inconsistency)
 - a. Error of calling a little black “black” but much black “white”
 - b. Error of calling a little bitterness “bitter” but much bitterness “sweet”
 - c. Error of calling few murders “wrong” but many murders (in war) “right”
 Conclusion: Thus we know the “gentlemen” are morally confused

Each part of the argument is built on a single rhetorical device: self-answered questions in the first, unanswered rhetorical questions in the second, and direct statements in the third. The first appeals to common experience, the second takes up war, and the third returns to common-sense feelings about inconsistency. The parts are marked by increasing harshness. Each ends with a statement about “the gentlemen of the world,” who at the end of the argument stand convicted of moral confusion.

¹Those figures are 585, 1,312, and 2,716 words. See further Brooks **Mwòdž 14-16**.

²See Brooks **Ethical**, Brooks **Fragment**.

³Graham **Divisions** 18-28.

MZ 18 incorporates no material from MZ 17;⁴ it is an independent composition. It argues not from outside the state, like MZ 17, but from inside; it makes its case against war not from the intrinsic wrongfulness of killing, as had MZ 17, but from the state’s point of view, as affecting the survival of the state; it notes, for example, that deaths in war reduce the number of worshipers for the spirits. The form of the essay is an initial statement by Mwòdž, who then meets a series of possible objections to it:

Prologue: If the rulers of today wish to provide well for their states . . .⁵

For this reason 是故 [quotes an “ancient saying”]: One predicts the future from the past

Thesis: War causes hardship, and thereby reduces state wealth and strength

Objection 1: Victory brings fame and wealth through conquest

Reply 1: Losses exceed gains, and gains do not meet the needs of the state

Objection 2: Some states have gained more land and population by war

Reply 2: But it is not according to the Dâu; a medicine that cures few patients

Example 1: Small states are extinguished by great states

Objection 3: Those states perished because they could not employ their masses

Reply 3: Even those who could do so perished:

Example 1: Hvlw of Wú, briefly successful, finally destroyed by Ywè

Example 2: Jī-bwó, the strongest of the six Jīn lords, was later killed

Summation: For this reason 是故 [quotes an “ancient proverb”]: One should look for the future in the mirror of human experience

The argument is at first in general terms, but halfway through⁶ turns to historical examples. The head and tail statements invoke the general value of learning from history, the intended lesson being that in the game of war, most states lose, and even the winners are not secure in their victory. The unidentified interlocutor seems to be the ruler of a major state, who is inclined to venture upon conquest to benefit his state. That is, the policymakers who were denounced from a distance in MZ 17 have been brought inside the argument, which is carried on entirely in terms of state interest, as conventionally conceived. The morally-based appeal of MZ 17 is essentially absent.

The argument gains rhetorical force by its framing wisdom quotes. MZ 17 was entirely linear; its argument reached an intended conclusion and stopped. So does that of MZ 18, but greater symmetry and thus force is gained by the use of framing quotations, along with the quasi-logical connective “for this reason.” The recurring quotation of Mwòdž (with the formula 子墨子言曰, “Our master Mwòdž said”) provides linear unification, and the sonority of simple repetition.

MZ 19, which is twice as long as MZ 18, is not built on MZ 18 save for a few recollections of that and other previous chapters; it is composed de novo. Like MZ 18, it gains horizontal unity by a repeated citation formula, here 子墨子曰. It abandons the end-symmetry of MZ 18 by introducing only the final conclusion by the logical connective 是故 “For this reason.”

⁴In contrast to the practice in other triplets; see Brooks **Mwòdž 14-16**.

⁵Mei notes that a clause is missing from the first sentence; Johnston accepts an emendation.

⁶Physically, the halfway point is reached with Example 1 under Reply 2.

In this outline of MZ 19, echoes of earlier MZ chapters are indicated in [brackets]:

- Prologue: Defining the good (what is helpful to Heaven, spirits, and men)
 Present rulers make war; they cannot tell black from white [MZ 17]
 Ancient rulers acted wisely; were honored by Heaven, spirits, and people
 Modern rulers make war, and injure Heaven, spirits, and people
 Armies are good only for killing; rulers are perverse to use them
 Chí, Jìn, Chǔ, and Ywè have excess land, yet seek still more land [MZ 18]
 O1: Some ancient conquests were virtuous
 R1: *You have not understood.* That was not 攻 “attack,” but 誅 “punishment”
 Example 1: The evil Myáu, conquered by Yǚ
 Example 2: Evil Jyé of Syà, conquered by Tāng
 Example 3: Evil Jòu of Shāng, conquered by Wǔ-wáng
 O2: Cases of ancient states expanding by conquest: Chǔ, Ywè, Chí, Jìn
 R2: *You have not understood.* That medicine kills most patients [MZ 18]
 O3: Rulers who make war wish to establish their virtue and attract others by it
 R3: But good government is the way to attract others
 Conclusion: Thus 是故 if rulers wish to benefit the world, they will avoid war

This has the same three-objection structure as MZ 18, and repeats material from it (the analogy of the medicine that kills most patients; several historical examples). It is longer through more detailed presentation of some historical examples, and through extended exposition on Mwòdž’s part; at the first two replies (R), “Mwòdž” insists that the objector has not understood his position: 子未察吾言之類，未明其故者也， and in MZ 19 he takes pains to be understood. He also concedes some ground to his opponents in MZ 18: this essay departs from the position of MZ 17-18 in accepting the idea that some wars are justified as “punishment” of the evil. MZ 19 clearly draws on earlier essays in the “Against War” triplet, while further adjusting to political realities.

In doing so, it reaches a level of eloquence far beyond that of its predecessors. Thus, the final Reply is not adversative, but a direct exposition of “good government.” The position is close to the populist phase of the Dzwǒ Jwàn⁷ and Mencius, in the idea that a good ruler 天下無敵 “has no enemy in all the world.”⁸

Of course, despite the assumption on which the logic of the MZ 19 argument rests, the rulers of this period did *not* wish to benefit the world, but to conquer it.

Works Cited

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⁷For the Dzwǒ Jwàn parallel, see Brooks **Ethical** 109.

⁸See MC 1A5, 0320.