

Identifying Upward:
Political Epistemology in an Early Chinese Political Theory

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“So what do we reckon brings order to the state and the people? If superiors in governing get the facts about subordinates, there is good order; if they fail to get the facts about subordinates, there is disorder.” — *Mòzǐ*

Political epistemology is the study of how epistemic matters interact with political concerns. The political thought of the *Mòzǐ*, a collection of writings by anonymous hands presenting the philosophy of Mò Dí 墨翟 (fl. ca. 430 BC) and his followers, the Mohists, is potentially instructive as to how social epistemology is fundamentally intertwined with political relations.

The Mohists formed one of early China’s most prominent social and philosophical movements. Spread geographically across the pre-imperial Chinese world, their school was active for about three hundred years, from Mò Dí’s lifetime in the middle of the fifth century B.C. to roughly the middle of the second century B.C. They presented China’s first systematic ethical and political theories, grounded in a distinctive brand of communitarian consequentialism. For the Mohists, “right” or “righteous” (*yì* 義) is what tends to promote the benefit of all, understood as material wealth, a thriving population, and social order. Social order includes, negatively, the absence of crime, deceit, harassment, injury, conflict, and aggression, and, positively, neighborly assistance, charity for the destitute, and fulfillment of the relational virtues associated with the social roles of ruler and subject, father and son, and elder and younger brother. Rulers are to be benevolent, subjects loyal, fathers kind, sons filially devoted, and brothers fraternally loving and respectful.¹

The Mohists see a stable political society as achieved through a process they call “identifying upward,” by which the subjects of a state identify with unified norms of judgment and conduct promulgated by leaders through a pyramidal political hierarchy. These socially shared norms the Mohists regard as instituted through the creation of political authority, which is justified partly by its effectiveness in implementing unified norms by which to organize social life.

The unified norms propagate from the top of the hierarchy downward. At the same time, however, the Mohists hold that upward identification and thus political legitimacy can be maintained only if those at the bottom of the hierarchy endorse how the norms are implemented. Crucially, if those in authority and those they govern do not agree on the facts pertinent to observing

and enforcing the norms, people may cease to identify upward, undermining social unity and defeating the justification for political authority. The legitimate, effective exercise of authority rests on shared judgments grounded in unified norms. Hence, as the epigram above puts it, only if those holding political authority grasp the factual situation among their subordinates can there be stable social order—this grasp being based on reports from the people below, employing unified standards of judgment.

The Mohists may be mistaken that consensus on norms can be achieved only through the exercise of political authority. Indeed, their own discussion already hints at an alternative approach to reaching agreement. But I will suggest they are probably on the right track in contending that the legitimacy of political authority can be sustained only if the institutions by which it is exercised embody shared norms and judgments. In this respect, the legitimacy of political authority indeed depends on whether those subject to authority identify upward. And as we will see, people's willingness to identify upward rests in turn on social epistemological factors.

The Origin of Political Authority

The Mohists present what is likely history's earliest speculative account of the origin of political authority from a state of nature. Their texts offer three overlapping, slightly different versions of this account, which are probably arranged in chronological order of composition. I will summarize shared features of the first two versions, which run closely parallel, and then later highlight a key development in the third version bearing on political epistemology.

A distinctive feature of the Mohist account is that the state of nature is marked by a radical plurality of norms. People each follow their own, individual conception of what is "right" (*yi*). (Some may think the death of a parent calls for a three-year mourning ritual, for example, while others may think a three-day ritual is enough.) This diversity breeds disagreement, as individuals each assume their conception of right should be universal and so apply it to condemn others' conceptions. The disagreement in turn leads to conflict and social chaos. People injure each other, families scatter, social cooperation ceases, and humanity falls into a disorderly state like that among nonhuman animals. An implication is that people can live a properly human life only through participation in an orderly political society.²

The people of the world come to understand that disorder arises because there are no political leaders to unify the norms everyone follows concerning what is right. Hence a virtuous, capable, and wise person is selected and established as the "Son of Heaven," or supreme ruler, subordinate only to Heaven

(*tiān* 天, a sky or nature deity). The Son of Heaven is charged with bringing about good order by unifying the norms followed by all the world.

Toward this end, the new ruler establishes a pyramidal structure of political authority with himself at the apex, three dukes below him, lords and high officials of various states below them, then heads of districts, and finally village heads. Officials at each level are chosen for their competence and virtue. Once the officials are in place, the ruler proclaims that everyone must “identify upward” or “conform upward” (*shàng tóng* 上同) with the norms of their superiors, having no heart to “ally together below.” People are to identify with the leadership and by so doing join in following and promulgating a unified set of norms. Specifically, they are to report good or bad conduct to their superiors, emulate their superiors’ judgments of right or wrong, recommend to them anything they find of value, and remonstrate with them if superiors commit errors. These practices will be rewarded and praised; failure to perform them will be punished and criticized.

All those who hear or see something good must report it to their superiors; all those who hear or see something bad must also report it to their superiors. What superiors deem right, you must also deem right; what superiors deem wrong, you must also deem wrong. If you possess something good, present it; if superiors commit errors, admonish them. Identify upward with your superiors and have no heart to align together below. When superiors get hold of people who do these things, they will reward them, and when the myriad people hear about them, they will praise them. (12/12–17)

Once the Son of Heaven has issued this policy, leaders at each level of the hierarchy implement it by proclaiming that their subjects must report good and bad conduct to the leader the next level up and emulate him in their judgments of right or wrong, their statements, and their actions. The village heads announce these orders:

As to all the myriad people of the village, all will identify upward with the district head and dare not align together below. What the district head deems right, you must also deem right; what the district head deems wrong, you must also deem wrong. Eliminate your bad statements and learn the good statements of the district head; eliminate your bad conduct and learn the good conduct of the district head. (12/19–21)

The district heads repeat a parallel announcement calling on their people to emulate the lord of their state; the lord of each state then similarly calls on his

people to emulate the Son of Heaven. Through this society-wide practice of model emulation, leaders at the level of the district, state, and realm unify the norms of everyone under their rule. Society as a whole then looks beyond the Son of Heaven to identify upward with Heaven itself:

Once the world is in order, the Son of Heaven again unites the world's norms of righteousness to identify upward with Heaven. (13/22–42)

Since the Mohists believe Heaven is a perfectly reliable moral exemplar, the requirement to identify upward with Heaven is intended to ensure that the content of the unified norms conforms to the objectively correct ethical *dào* 道, or way.

For the Mohists, then, political authority is justified by its effectiveness in unifying norms of judgment and conduct so as to bring about good order and thereby promote the benefit of all. Political society originates with the emergence of a leader who unifies norms; it is sustained by people's collective acceptance of and cooperation with the unified norms. The status of certain norms as authoritative is instituted through the invention of political authority, and conformity to such norms is the core of obedience to political authority.

In the Mohist origin story, violent conflict in the state of nature arises from normative anarchy—and not, as in the more familiar Hobbesian scenario, from individuals' untrammelled pursuit of self-interest. People cannot live together harmoniously because they cannot determine what norms to take as a basis for doing so. Everyone has their own view of what is right, none of them authoritative or convincing to others. But why do the Mohists think only political authority can resolve this disagreement over norms? Couldn't the community negotiate an agreement amongst themselves? For example, couldn't people settle on an overlapping consensus between their different conceptions of what is right? The Mohists do not seem to notice this route, perhaps because acting on an overlapping consensus is itself a norm about which, *ex hypothesi*, people disagree. Another suggestion might be that the Mohists could invoke their deity, Heaven, to settle normative disputes. Perhaps Heaven could intervene, commanding people to follow divinely revealed norms. Again, however, the Mohists seem to assume that appealing to Heaven is itself a norm about which people must first agree before they can converge in following Heaven's lead.

A further question is whether the Mohist origin scenario might be incoherent. People in the state of nature are depicted as living in families, alongside others in communities. Any form of community life probably presupposes at least some shared norms, so this depiction may conflict with the hypothesis that people held diverse, incompatible views of what is right. Perhaps, however, the Mohists could allow that the different norms people affirmed might

overlap in various ways. The crux of their view is that *if* there were a community without any political hierarchy, conflicts between the norms affirmed by its members would likely arise eventually, and resolving these would require the invention of political authority.

Political Authority and Epistemic Authority

The Mohist stance, then, is that political authority is needed to underwrite the moral epistemological authority by which people can jointly take some one set of norms to be the correct, appropriate, or authoritative basis for interacting with each other and organizing community life. In effect, before the invention of political authority, there is no such thing as intersubjective authority of any kind, and thus there are no objective, authoritative standards of correct or appropriate judgment or conduct. For the Mohists, the very notion of authoritative status is social and political; epistemic and normative authority or correctness are byproducts of political authority.³ Hence the process of establishing unified norms and so reaching epistemic and normative consensus inherently involves identifying *upward*. Consensus is intertwined with commitment to a hierarchical structure of authority.

The consensus the Mohists envision primarily concerns norms governing ethical judgment and conduct, or what people deem “right” (*yì*). These norms clearly pertain to moral epistemology. But the unified norms probably also include epistemic norms in a broader sense that covers judgments of empirical fact.⁴ For the Mohists, correctness of assertion—and thus knowledge—is determined by the correct use of “names,” or words, and the norms that determine the correct use of names are probably among those settled through the process of identifying upward. The terms the texts use for the attitudes of deeming right or wrong that people are to learn from their superiors—*shì* 是 (right, approve, “this”) and *fēi* 非 (wrong, condemn, “not-this”)—apply to both evaluative and empirical matters, including the issue of what is or is not correctly referred to by various “names.” Moreover, the Mohists do not distinguish neatly between ethical or evaluative judgments and descriptive or empirical judgments. They call on political subordinates to model their statements or assertions (*yán* 言) on their leaders’, without distinguishing between descriptive reports of fact and prescriptive or ethical teachings. Similarly, their discussion of criteria for evaluating whether to accept or reject assertions seamlessly blends ethical, prudential, and descriptive issues. The descriptive, empirical question of whether something exists is to be settled by the same criteria as the political question of whether some policy is effective or the ethical question of whether some practice is right.⁵ It is also clear from the Son of Heaven’s initial policy announcement that the aim of identifying upward is not simply to converge on

unified norms but to share information relevant to their observance. As the next section will explain, legitimate political authority rests on consensus regarding factual reports as well as ethical norms.

Given the links between political and epistemic authority, the Mohists' description of the origin of political authority raises questions about the exit from the state of nature that bear as well on the conditions for epistemic consensus. If people in the state of nature disagree so radically about what is right, how do they manage to agree in diagnosing and resolving the cause of their predicament? How do they agree on the qualifications of the emergent leader, and how are they persuaded to identify upward with him? How do they bootstrap themselves from normative and epistemic anarchy into a political society organized around shared norms?

The Mohist picture seems to be that people each realize, by their own norms or standards, that life in the state of nature is intolerably chaotic—subhuman, the texts imply—and thus that political authority is needed to secure order through unified norms. Given this shared acknowledgment of the need for leadership, people can converge in following a leader even though they do not yet agree on the content of the norms the leader will promulgate. The texts do not specify exactly how the Son of Heaven is selected, saying only that he is chosen for his virtues, wisdom, and competence. The implication is that, whether the Son of Heaven asserts himself or is put forward by others, he has sufficiently compelling personal qualities that some critical mass of people begin to defer to him, at least tacitly and conditionally. The process could be similar to other scenarios in which a leader spontaneously emerges from an unstructured group, as when children tacitly acknowledge a better or more confident player as captain of a pickup ball team or neighbors look to an experienced local activist to coordinate a community project. Recognizing that their problems can be resolved only by cooperating under the coordination of a leader, people tacitly converge in treating someone who seems experienced, competent, or knowledgeable as their chief, and others fall into line. Once a leader is established among some portion of a population, others are likely to acknowledge his authority as well, particularly if his leadership is perceived as effective. As the Mohists describe the transition to political society, political authority need not rest on people's explicit consent, as expressed in a contract, for example. But clearly it is established by either their choice of or at least their tacit cooperation with a ruler they expect will unify norms and achieve good order. Once the superior-subordinate relation has been established, members of the community share a basis for converging on unified norms: they do so by identifying with and conforming to the leadership.

At the same time, however, the Mohists' hypothetical picture implicitly presents an alternative to their explicit stance that norms can be unified only if people identify upward with political authority. People in the Mohist state of

nature ultimately do manage to step back from normative anarchy, recognize the cause of their predicament, and converge in following a charismatic leader. That they can spontaneously cooperate in these ways suggests the Mohists may have misidentified the actual basis for normative and epistemic consensus. The leader's role seems mainly that of a catalyst for agreement, not its source. A more fundamental explanation may be that, reacting to violent chaos induced by stubborn, universal disagreement, people begin to value consensus, and thus cooperation and coordination, more than they value their original conception of right. They come to appreciate community and unity and thus are prepared to identify with the emerging political hierarchy. What they can agree on—and thus justify to each other—begins to take priority over their personal, idiosyncratic convictions. Contrary to the Mohists' own claims, then, arguably their narrative of the exit from the state of nature implies that political authority is not the origin of consensus but its product. As we will see, this point is reinforced by their discussion of how normative and epistemic consensus are needed to sustain authority and how they can persist even in a community that ceases to identify upward. That people identify upward may be a necessary condition for the legitimacy of political authority, but it may not be the fundamental explanation of how consensus and authority emerge.

Epistemic Unity and Social Order

A crucial dimension of the hierarchical political society the Son of Heaven establishes is that conformity to the unified norms is encouraged through a system of incentives and disincentives. Conformity to the norms is rewarded and praised, as is reporting of others' good or bad conduct, recommending valuable resources to superiors, and remonstrating with superiors over their errors. Failure to conform, report, and recommend or remonstrate is punished and criticized. These rewards and punishments are dispensed through the rough equivalent of a civil service system plus a legal system. They may take various forms, including job appointments or dismissals, promotions or demotions, gifts or fines, criminal penalties, and public acclaim or condemnation. They are the leadership's primary levers of power, the means by which to encourage good conduct and sanction wrongdoing. The administration of rewards and punishments thus implements and embodies the shared norms that hold political society together. We can think of rewards and punishments as concrete outcomes of the social institutions that manage government administration, law enforcement, and criminal justice.

For this reason, the Mohists stress the importance of allocating rewards and punishments reliably and consistently in line with the unified norms, such that the common people endorse how they are administered. Failure to maintain

the people's approval in dispensing rewards and punishments undermines the project of identifying upward and accordingly may cause political authority to lose legitimacy and social order to break down. The crucial role of rewards and punishments makes social epistemology pivotal to maintaining legitimate political authority. Rewards and punishments can embody unified norms only if members of society largely endorse how the leadership dispenses them, and this endorsement rests on lower and higher ranks of the political hierarchy agreeing in their understanding and assessment of the relevant facts.

This epistemological concern is reflected in the epigram at the head of this chapter, taken from the third version of "Identifying Upward." This version of the doctrine highlights the social epistemological issue of how to ensure that the leadership and the people below converge in judgments about the facts on the basis of which the unified norms are enforced. The text begins by claiming that the "task of the wise" is "to calculate what puts the state and the common people in order and do it" (13/1). What, then, brings order to the state and its people?

If superiors in governing get the facts about subordinates, there is order; if they don't get the facts about subordinates, there is disorder. How do we know it is so? If superiors in governing get the facts about subordinates, then this is understanding what the people have done good or wrong. If they understand what the people have done good or wrong, they get hold of good people and reward them and get hold of vicious people and punish them. If good people are rewarded and vicious people punished, the state will surely be in order. (13/2–4)

The phrase rendered "the facts about subordinates" is semantically richer than the English translation suggests. *Qíng* 情, the word interpreted as "facts," implies a thorough grasp of the actual circumstances among the people, along with, perhaps, understanding and winning over their sentiments, as *qíng* can also refer to feelings. The reference to what people have done good or wrong is also ambiguous. Besides good or wrong conduct, the phrasing could be interpreted as referring to what people *judge* to be good or wrong.

Either way, the gist is that those in power must genuinely understand circumstances among the people, so that they can ensure rewards and punishments go to those who indeed merit them. In the third version of "Identifying Upward," this is the focal issue by which the need for unified norms is introduced. Only if leaders can govern by getting people to identify upward with unified norms, claims the text, is it possible for them to reliably understand the conditions among those below (13/7). In this version of the doctrine, the concrete practice of identifying upward primarily concerns reporting to superiors

at the level of the clan, state, and realm any conduct that displays either care for and benefit to the community or disregard for and harm to them (see, e.g., 13/23–25). Care and benefit are treated as basic values—care being a standing disposition to engage in mutually beneficial interaction with others—and unifying the community’s norms lies in encouraging everyone to communicate upward any conduct that manifests care and benefit or their opposites. Through this reporting, those in power “get the facts” about those below and can reward or punish the right people.

The dimension of identifying upward stressed here, then, is epistemic: people not only share the norms of caring about and benefiting society but identify with the political hierarchy such that they report the information leaders need to encourage and enforce conformity to these norms. The result is that lower and higher levels of the hierarchy agree in their grasp of the facts on the basis of which authority is exercised and, accordingly, on the appropriateness of rewards and punishments. Epistemic unity—shared knowledge of the relevant facts—is treated as a condition for political unity, social stability, and the appropriate functioning of the civil service and legal system. Through the political hierarchy, members of society share norms of judgment, cooperate in exchanging information, and accordingly reach consensus about facts relevant to political administration, including the allocation of rewards and punishments. When the system functions effectively, the Mohists claim, leaders’ epistemic acuity becomes nearly godlike. They quickly learn of worthy or criminal conduct, problems to solve, and resources to use even at great remove, almost as if they were omniscient, because everyone assists them in passing information up through the hierarchy (12/61–69).

An intriguing consequence of the social epistemological dimension of identifying upward is that the need for epistemic unity constrains the norms that the Son of Heaven can impose on society. The norms cannot be arbitrary or formulated only to serve only his own interests, for they must attract the ongoing endorsement and cooperation of the people—as, the Mohists think, norms such as caring about and benefiting the community will. Rulers must be publicly perceived to act in ways the people below agree are appropriate. For the ruler’s norms to function effectively in maintaining political unity and social order, those below must agree with those above concerning their content and implementation, drawing on a shared grasp of the relevant facts.

How Political Legitimacy Can Collapse

What happens if those in power fail to maintain the needed normative and epistemic consensus? For example, what if they abuse their position by

governing mainly for their own and their cronies' benefit, such that their subjects turn against them?

As we have seen, the Mohists hold that in the state of nature political authority is needed to bestow authoritative status on society's shared norms. Once political society is up and running, however, they seem to think the situation changes. If leaders fail to implement the norms that sustain political society in ways publicly perceived as appropriate, the norms can escape the leadership's grasp and work as a unifying force directly among the people themselves. People may rally together around norms that have become detached from the political hierarchy, answering to each other rather than to their superiors. They "ally together below," as the Mohists put it, rather than identifying upward. Society's unified norms break down, as there are now at least two competing sets of norms, those of the leadership and those of the people. Accordingly, those in power lose legitimacy, as they now fail to achieve the basic end for which they were entrusted with authority, unifying society's norms.

Mohist writings explicitly address such a scenario, claiming that unlike the sage-kings of old, who governed so as to promote benefit and eliminate harm to the people (12/51–52), rulers in their day govern for the sake of their cronies and relatives, appointing them to official positions just to enjoy high rank and salary (12/52–61). If leaders are not perceived to act for the benefit of the people, the Mohists predict, people will ally together in resistance, withhold information, and refuse to identify upward.

The people know that the superiors don't really install government leaders to bring good order to the people. Hence they all ally together, concealing things, and none are willing to identify upward with their superiors. Thus superiors and subordinates have different norms. If superiors and subordinates have different norms, rewards and praise are not enough to encourage good, while punishments and penalties are not enough to discourage viciousness. (12/52–55)

A pivotal consequence of this breakdown in the unified norms is that the ruler's rewards and punishments lose their leverage over the people, since the community no longer endorses how he allocates them (12/55–61, 13/17–22). The people allied together below may condemn those the ruler praises while praising those he punishes. Ultimately, the Mohists contend, people respect the approval or disapproval of their peers in the community more than rewards or punishments from a ruler whose norms the community rejects. As they see it, people will not obey leaders who are unable to unify the norms of the community.

If superiors and subordinates have different norms, those the superiors reward are those the community condemns. It's said, people dwell together in communities. If people are condemned in the community, then even supposing they are rewarded by superiors, this isn't enough to encourage them...If people are praised in the community, then even supposing they are punished by superiors, this isn't enough to discourage them. (12/56–59)

If the community comes to reject their superiors' norms in this way, the political system fails, as rewards and punishments—the main levers of power—lose their effectiveness in maintaining social order. Society reverts to a state of nature, without a functioning government.

If one is established to govern a state and to act as the people's government leader, yet one's rewards and praise are not enough to encourage good, while one's punishments and penalties are not enough to discourage viciousness, then isn't this the same as...when people first arose, before there were government leaders? (12/59–61)

Political authority is justified by its effectiveness in leading people to identify upward with the unifying norms of political society and so achieve good social order. If people cease to do so because they reject the leaders' norms, this justification collapses, and the ruler's claim to legitimate authority disintegrates.

By implication, then, the Mohists take consensus about the appropriateness of political appointments and the allocation of rewards and punishments to be a necessary condition for political legitimacy. Fully understood, identifying upward requires consensus not just about abstract norms but about the concrete application of the norms, which draws in turn on consensus concerning the pertinent facts, as communicated through the political hierarchy. If the people below disagree enough with their superiors about the facts that they regularly dispute how rewards and punishments are administered, normative unity is lost. Even supposing rulers pay lip service to norms the people endorse, if they ignore relevant facts or interpret them differently from the community, in practice they are following disparate norms, which the community may reject. A shared understanding of the facts is necessary for shared observance of the unified norms.

Consensus and Institutions

The Mohists tie the legitimacy of political authority to consensus in norms and judgments manifested through identification upward with the political hierarchy. The conception of consensus in play relates to political epistemology

along two dimensions. One is that the effective, legitimate implementation of political authority requires a shared, society-wide commitment to some body of norms as authoritative—including epistemic norms, or norms of correct judgment and assertion. The other is that to preserve legitimacy, the hierarchical political system must maintain epistemic consensus. If different ranks in the hierarchy do not agree on the facts and how they pertain to the implementation of society's norms, the normative unity needed to sustain social order and justify political authority may collapse.

The two dimensions are interdependent. Without shared norms, epistemic consensus cannot exist. But if epistemic consensus is not sustained and manifested through implementation of the norms—specifically, by allocating rewards and punishments in a manner the community approves—people cease to identify upward, and the unified norms break down.

Mohist texts seem to assume that the scope of the norms with which people are to identify is comprehensive, covering all areas of life. They do not distinguish a sphere of private life, within which disagreement about values might be tolerated, from public life as members of a polity. They appear to have no notion of reasonable disagreement in political life, and accordingly no conception of politics as a field in which distinct parties advocate diverse values or negotiate different positions about the priority or interpretation of shared values. They share a common traditional Chinese view that the very existence of factions or parties in political society reflects moral failure, either in the leadership or in those who form factions. Competent, virtuous leaders inspire unity, not factionalism; worthy people do what is right, about which there should be little debate. Society should be organized around a comprehensive conception of the *dào* (way)—the correct way of personal, social, and political life—about which all right-thinking people should agree.

The assumption that political society should be organized on the basis of norms embodying a comprehensive conception of the good might appear to render the doctrine of identifying upward irrelevant to our concerns today, since reasonable disagreement about the good seems a salient, ineluctable feature of modern political life. But the feature of their position the Mohists themselves especially emphasize is directly relevant to our discursive and political context. As we have seen, they regard consensus as vital particularly because of its role in underwriting the allocation of rewards and punishments. To appreciate the significance of this view, we need to recognize that Mohist references to rewards and punishments amount to shorthand for the functioning of government institutions such as the civil service and the legal system. The point the Mohists highlight, then, is that such institutions can function effectively only if a consensus obtains across society that they operate according to popularly endorsed norms. Without such a consensus, people may withdraw their support

for the political system, because its institutions regularly produce outcomes that defy their view of what is right. Importantly, the consensus must cover not only norms but the facts on the basis of which the norms are applied. Widespread disagreement about the facts, especially between the authorities and the people they govern, subverts identification with the system. If people conclude that their government regularly fails to “get the facts” about the community and respond to them appropriately, they will cease to identify upward, causing the political system to lose legitimacy.

Of course, in our ethical and political climate, the consensus that underlies a stable political society is not expected to be comprehensive, and divergence between disparate conceptions of the good is common. But the Mohists nevertheless offer us a crucial lesson: a prerequisite for a flourishing political society—even a liberal, pluralist one—is a broad, stable consensus that core social and political institutions conform to shared norms. A heterogeneous political society that embraces diverse conceptions of the good can do so only against a backdrop of broad public endorsement of the norms embodied by its institutions and approval of how these institutions respond to the facts.

Conclusion

The Mohist doctrine of identifying upward underscores the vital role of social epistemology in justifying or undermining the legitimacy of political authority. The Mohists hold that legitimate authority and a stable social order can be sustained only if members of a political society identify with its leadership, sharing with them a consensus concerning the norms by which to organize social and political life. People will continue to identify upward, the Mohists think, as long as they agree that society’s institutions implement shared norms reliably in line with socially acknowledged facts. Conversely, if disagreement arises concerning either the norms or how effectively institutions implement them, the legitimacy of the political system suffers accordingly. If the disagreement is severe, the system may fail entirely.⁶

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¹ For an extended discussion of Mohist thought, see Fraser (2016). For briefer overviews, see Fraser (2002), Loy (2007), Lai (2008), or Van Norden (2007). On political theory, see also Hansen (1992) and Van Norden (2007). On epistemology, see Loy (2008). On Mohist ethics, see especially Robins (2012).

² This summary is based on *Mòzǐ* 11/1–25 and 12/1–41. Citations to *Mòzǐ* give chapter and line numbers in Hung (1956), by which the corresponding passages can be found in Fraser (2020) or on line at the Chinese Text Project, D. Sturgeon, ed. (<https://ctext.org/mozi>), using the search tool at <https://ctext.org/tools/concordance>.

³ This conceptual relationship extends to Mohist epistemic standards such as Heaven’s intention (27/73) or the “three models” (35/7), I suggest. Heaven’s epistemic and moral authority are inseparable from its political authority (Fraser 2016, pp. 84, 120), and the “three models” rest on the political authority of Heaven and the sage-kings.

⁴ I use “epistemic” and “epistemological” here for issues related to the grounds for, assessment of, and agreement regarding judgment and assertion and thus knowledge.

⁵ See, e.g., 35/1–10. For discussion, see Fraser (2016, pp. 62–69).

⁶ I thank Eric Schliesser for a thoughtful discussion that influenced this chapter and the editors and an anonymous reader for comments that improved it.