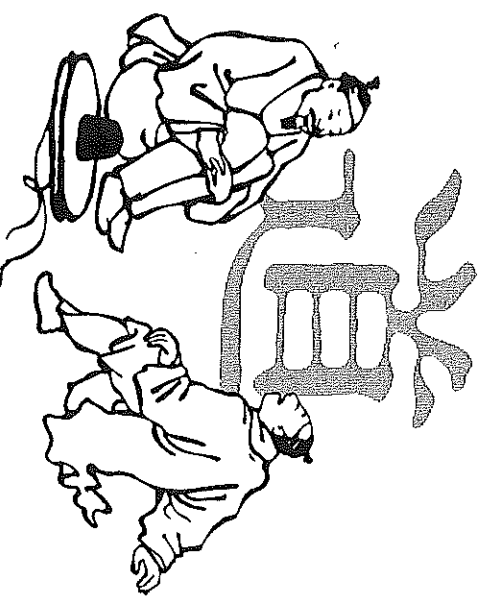


Philosophical Argument in Ancient China



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小取), longer and shorter collections of fragments of two documents including their titles, *Expounding the Canons* (Yü ching 語經) and *Names and Objects* (Ming shih 名實). The titles are taken from the opening words and are unrelated to the content (as in the *Analects* and much of *Chuang-tzu*).

The documents when sorted out turn out to have been written in three stages.

(1) *Expounding the Canons*, thirteen ethical propositions with accompanying explanations. The 'canons' of the title seems to be the original ten doctrines of Mo-tzu. There was also a lost document containing definitions of words in the essay titles formulating the ten doctrines; its existence is inferred from the conspicuous absence of these crucially important terms among the 75 definitions of the *Canons*.¹

(2) The *Canons* and *Explanations*, which with the older *Expounding the Canons* compose a single manual of Mohist disputation, in the form of annotated definitions and propositions. The *Explanations*, which are notes or comments rather than detailed expositions, are sometimes missing and vary greatly in length and comprehensiveness; they were probably jotted down from teachers' oral explanations of *Canons*. The *Canons* themselves would be learned by heart.

(3) *Names and Objects*, a fragmentary but continuous treatise written after the completion of the manual.

The documents are datable only as from some time between the late 4th and late 3rd centuries B.C. The purpose of the manual is the clarification of the basic concepts of the four branches of knowledge, but a number of the *Explanations* include logical or scientific demonstrations of some length, and examination of the definitions and propositions shows that many of them are designed to interrelate logically. Both definitions and propositions fall into groups which run parallel throughout the two series, implying an organising principle which must be identified if the items are to be read in context. The key to it may be found in a *Canon* distinguishing three sources and four kinds of knowledge.

A80 (*Canon*) "Knowledge. By report, by explanation, by experience. Of the name, of the object, of how to connect them, of how to act.

(*Explanation*) Having received it at second hand, 'by report'. That if square it will not rotate, 'by explanation'. Having been a witness oneself, 'by experience'.

Of what it is called by 'of the name'. Of what is so called, 'of the object'. Of the mating of name and object, 'of how to connect them'. Of intent and performance, 'of how to act'."

There is a related classification of four sources of doubt in *Canon* B10; we shall examine them in turn when dealing with the four branches of knowledge separately. Both sets correlate with the themes of the successive groups of *Canons*.

Theme	Definitions	Propositions	Knowing	Doubt due to
Discourse	A1-6	A88-B12	how to connect name to object	the accidental
Ethics	A7-39	(Expounding the <i>Canons</i>)	how to act	the undemanding
Knowledge and change	A40-51	B13-16	—	having passed
Geometry, optics, mechanics	A52-69	B17-31	objects	the coinciding
Argumentation	A70-75	B32-82	names	—

(A76-87 Appendix to definitions; 12 words with ambiguous usages).

Although it is sometimes convenient to impose our Western classifications and say that the Mohist discusses ethics, science, even logic, it is important not to lose sight of his own fourfold classification of knowledge. In particular, the *Canons* in which one may look for logic or proto-logic belong for him to two quite different arts, of discourse and argumentation. A central problem presented by the organisation of the *Canons* is why the four branches of knowledge are treated in groups falling into pairs separated by a group on the theme we have summed up as 'knowledge and change'. Why too is there no source of doubt corresponding to argumentation? We shall return to these questions later.²

Knowledge and naming

The *Canons* deal with knowledge by three forms of the word *chih* 知 'know', roughly corresponding to English 'wits', 'to wot (= know)' and 'wisdom'; the last two are graphically distinguished by the 'sun' (日) * and 'heart' (心) radicals respectively. The definitions offered are contrastive.

* The 'sun' radical was eliminated in the graphic standardisation of the text except in the second half of the *Explanations*, where it survives throughout (G ut sup. 77).

A3 (*Canons*) "The 'wits' are the faculty.

(*Explanation*) The 'wits': being the means by which one knows, one necessarily does know. (Like the eyesight)

A4 (*Canon*) "Thinking' is the seeking.

(*Explanation*) 'Thinking': by means of one's wits one seeks something, but does not necessarily find it. (Like peering)

A5 (*Canon*) 'Knowing' is the contact.

(*Explanation*) 'Knowing': by means of one's wits, having passed the thing one is able to describe it. (Like seeing)

A6 (*Canon*) 'Understanding' is the clarity.

(*Explanation*) 'Understanding': by means of one's wits, in discourse about the thing one's knowledge of it is apparent. (Like clear sight)"

Unlike other texts the *Canons* do not treat the heart as the organ of knowing, but speak always of the wits, that is of the intelligence or consciousness. Although thinking is fallible, the knowledge derived from it is conceived as certain.[†] As for knowing, it differs from perceiving in that it continues after perception is past; one is still able to describe the thing perceived. This point is developed in another *Canon*.

B46 (*Canon*) "When one knows, it is not by means of the five senses.

Explained by: duration.

(*Explanation*) The knower sees by means of the eye and the eye by means of fire but the fire does not see. If the only means were the five senses, knowing as it endures would not fit the fact. Seeing by means of the eye is like seeing by means of fire."

As for the four branches of knowledge, all but knowing how to act are classified in relation to names and objects. Objects, more literally solids (*shih* 實 'solid, real', in contrast with *hsü* 虛 'tenuous, unreal'), are concrete and particular. The names which may or may not fit them are of three sorts.

A78 (*Canon*) "Names. Unrestricted, of the kind, private.

(*Explanation*) 'Thing' is unrestricted; any object necessarily awaits this name. Naming something 'horse' is of the kind, for 'like the object' one necessarily has the use of this name.

[†] If 'necessarily' normally implies logical or causal necessity in the *Canons* (cf. p. 143 below); the point is presumably that what is known and not merely supposed (*yi wei* 以爲) is *a priori* certain (cf. A23, 24

"Sleep' is the wits not knowing anything. 'Dreaming' is supposing to be so while asleep." B10 "Is it knowing? Or is it supposing the already ended to be so?")

Naming someone 'Tsang' is private: this name stays in this object."

The theory of naming is purely nominalistic, as is the only other in pre-Han literature, that of Hsün-tzu's 'Correction of Names'. You name an object 'horse' and apply the name to everything which is like it, of its kind, 'horse' is simply a shorthand for 'like the object'. The assumption that common naming is by similarity is so deep-rooted that the Mohist excludes from common names not only the proper name which applies to only one object but the name 'thing' which applies to any object irrespective of similarity. Referring and saying merely tell us what an object is like.

A31 (*Canon*) "To 'refer' is to give an analogue for the object.

A32 (*Canon*) To 'say' is to emit references."

This is all that is needed for communication because to know what a thing is like is to know all about it.

B70 (*Canon*) "When you hear that something you do not know is like something you do know, you know them both. Explained by: informing.

(*Explanation*) A thing outside you do know, the thing in the room you do not know. Someone says: 'The colour of the thing in the room is like the colour of this.' Then the thing you do not know is like the thing you do know. It is as with 'White or black, with which does one win? [in argument over the colour of something]. This is like its colour, and what is like something white is necessarily white.' In the present case too you know that its colour is like something white, therefore you know that it is white.

"A name uses what you are clear about to correct what you do not know, it does not let what you do not know cast doubt on what you are clear about. (Like measuring an unknown length by means of a foot-rule). What is outside, you know by experience; what is in the room, you know by explanation."

Change and necessity

Let us return to the problem of the bridging section on knowledge and change which separates the two pairs of disciplines. For the Later Mohists, the deepest and most troubling of problems is the relation between knowledge and temporal change. They

are living in an age of rapid social and intellectual transformation, and want to establish the teaching of Mo-tzu on impregnable foundations. Alone among Chinese thinkers, they share with the Greeks the faith that all their questions can be settled by reason—in their own terms, by *pien*, the arguing out of alternatives. We saw that knowing is distinguished from perceiving by its continuance; after 'having passed' the thing one is still able to describe it.³ We mentioned also⁴ that of the four sources of doubt the one which corresponds to the bridging section is 'having passed'.

B10 (*Canon*) "One doubts. Explained by: the accidental, the unmanding, the coinciding, having passed.

(*Explanation*) (of the last item). Is it knowing? Or is it supposing the already ended to be so?—"having passed".

The bridging definitions, which are of such words as 'commencement', 'transformation', 'motion', start with time and space, using for the former the verb *chü* 久 'endure' nominalised, and understanding the noun *yü* 宇 'space' as extension.

A40 (*Canon*) "Duration' is pervasion of different times.

A41 (*Canon*) 'Space' is pervasion of different places."

The bridging propositions explain that space and duration are not mutually pervasive (*chien-pai*).⁵ It is the 'durationless', the moment, which is mutually pervasive with space, and duration is the passage from one moment to the next. The purpose of this analysis is apparently to disconnect present from past and show that forms of government once good over the whole of space may lose their appropriateness with changing times, for the sequence concludes:

B16 (*Canon*) "Putting it in the time when it is so or in the not yet so. Explained by: in the time in question.

(*Explanation*) 'Yao is good at ruling' is from the present putting it in the past. If from the past it were put in the present, it would be 'Yao is incapable of ruling'."

So much for appeal to the examples of Yao and Shun in these changing times. The full significance of the bridging sections emerges when we come to the last two of the definitions, which contrast the temporarily 'staying' (*chü* 止) and the unending, the 'necessary' (*pi* 之). This accounts for the placing of the bridging sections in the organisation of the *Canons*; the two preceding disciplines (how to connect name and object, and how to act) prove on examination to be concerned with the temporary, the two which follow (about objects and about names) with necessary relations, the causal between objects and the logical between names.

A40 (*Canon*) "To 'stay' is to endure as it was.

(*Explanation*) In the *not* staying which is durationless, something fits 'ox' and 'non-horse'. (Like an arrow passing a pillar). In the *not* staying which has duration, something fits 'horse' and 'non-horse'. (Like a man passing over a bridge)."

The *Canon* is about remaining *x* and non-*y* over a period of time. The *Explanation* points out that, since the definition forbids us to say *x* stays *x* for any one moment of the period, there is also *not* staying in which it is *x* and non-*y*. Otherwise, *not* staying extends over a period in which it begins as *x* and ends as non-*x*.*

A41 (*Canon*) "The 'necessary' is the unending.

(*Explanation*) It applies to cases where complements are perfect. Such cases as 'elder brother or younger' and 'something so in one respect or not in one respect' are the necessary and the unnecessary.[†] Being this or not this is necessary."

Staying *x* comes to an end, but being either *x* or non-*x* does not; it is necessary, for example, that one of brothers is either elder or younger. The word *pi*, which elsewhere in the literature implies no more than certainty, is used by the Later Mohists regularly of logical or causal necessity. It is used only of connexions (*ho* 合), causal between objects, logical between names; as for connexion between name and object, the opening sentence of the treatise called *Names and Objects* is "Names and objects do not connect necessarily."

A83 (*Canon*) "Connexion. Exact, appropriate, necessary.

(*Explanation*) (of the last item). When one is necessarily absent without the other, 'necessary'. What is of the sages, employ but do not treat as necessary. The 'necessary', admit and do not doubt. The converse apply on both sides, not on one without the other."

Here, "when one is necessarily absent without the other" allows one-way dependence, the "converse" requires two-way. The pronouncements of the sages, instructive as they are, are without the certainty of the logically necessary.

The 'a priori'

In one of the obscurer *Explanations* we find these mysterious sentences:

* The account of this *Canon* in G *ut sup.* 298f now seems to me forced and unconvincing.

† I formerly preferred to emend the text here (G *ut sup.* 299), but have since noticed that the apparently forced syntax has an exact parallel in *Expounding the Canons* 8 (quoted p. 157 below).