

Forthcoming in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*
Author's Preprint

Truth and Chinese Philosophy: A Plea for Pluralism

Frank Saunders Jr.

Yonsei University – Underwood International College

Email: frank.saunders.jr@yonsei.ac.kr

Phone: +852 6371-8679

Abstract:

The question of whether or not early Chinese philosophers had a concept of truth has been a topic of some scholarly debate over the past few decades. The present paper offers a novel assessment of the debate, and suggests that no answer is fully satisfactory, as the plausibility of each turns in no small part on difficult and unsettled philosophical issues prior to the interpretation of any ancient Chinese philosophical texts—particularly the issues of what it means to “have a concept” and how we understand the concept of truth itself. This paper summarizes prominent views within the debate over truth and Chinese philosophy and offers conditional assessments of each answer with respect to contemporary theories of concepts and theories of truth. The paper concludes with an appeal to methodological and interpretive pluralism, within reasonable constraints, in discussions of this topic.

Keywords: truth, Chinese philosophy, concepts, methodology

Truth and Chinese Philosophy: A Plea for Pluralism

Frank Saunders Jr.

1. Introduction

Did ancient Chinese philosophers have a concept of truth? Scholars of Chinese thought have offered opposing answers to this question for decades, giving rise to a body of rigorous, compelling, but also contradictory work. On the one hand, Chad Hansen's bold claim that ancient Chinese philosophers "had no concept of truth" points to fascinating possibilities concerning both early Chinese and contemporary Western philosophy (Hansen 1985: 492). It seems at least possible that the concept of truth is a parochial, tied to habits and priorities of Western philosophical thought that early Chinese philosophers simply did not share. It also seems possible that they constructed their understanding of mind, world, and language using alternative foundational concepts—concepts that Hansen, along with other theorists such as David Hall, Roger Ames, Chris Fraser and others explore and develop in detail. On the other hand, however, Alexis McLeod's (2016) project of reconstructing theories of truth using ancient Chinese philosophical texts also seems like important and even necessary work. After all, if we as modern philosophers are to learn from ancient, non-Western philosophical traditions, then we must be willing to be more flexible about our understanding of concepts our respective traditions hold to be fundamental, and not merely cast them aside when we are confronted with unfamiliar philosophical contexts.

Though apparently contradictory, perhaps both approaches to answering this question can be contextually justified, depending in part on one's project, aims, interpretive methodology, audience, and other external considerations. At least I am comfortable sitting on this fence, but I suspect that I am in the minority. Most scholars involved in this debate are instead deeply committed one way or the other—so much so that they tend to view opposing answers simply as non-starters for talk about Chinese philosophy at all. As Bryan van Norden claims, if Hansen, along with Hall and Ames, were correct about there being no concept of truth in Chinese philosophy, then his own project would be fundamentally wrongheaded (Van Norden 2007: 362). And I suspect that Hansen, Hall, Ames and

their sympathizers would indeed consider a project such as McLeod's to be fundamentally wrongheaded. What's worse is that this stalemate affects more than the study of Chinese philosophy alone, as our answer to the question of truth and Chinese philosophy determines what we can expect to learn *from* the ancient Chinese tradition for broader philosophical purposes, and not merely what we learn *about* it. Should we be focused on reconstructing ancient accounts of mind, world, and language independent of the concept of truth, as Hansen, Hall, and Ames do? Or should we focus on developing novel theories of truth using these very same philosophical sources, as McLeod does? Which approach we take ultimately depends upon our answer to the question of whether or not there was a concept of truth in Chinese philosophy.

In this paper, I argue that the question of whether or not there is a concept of truth in Chinese philosophy is at least temporarily unanswerable, as it turns in no small part on yet unsettled philosophical issues prior to the interpretation of any Chinese philosophical texts. In particular, it turns on what it means to have a concept, and the nature of truth itself. In this way, only after these prior issues are settled could we determine the right way to approach the topic of truth and Chinese philosophy. On the one hand, this conclusion is, admittedly, rather bleak, since it might be taken to imply that we cannot say anything about the topic of truth and Chinese philosophy until these prior issues are settled. But on the other hand, I think it actually leaves the debate in a much better position to fruitfully proceed, and perhaps even to transform from a two-sided debate into a more open discussion. This is because the conclusion leaves us able to consider a plurality of approaches to the topic of truth and Chinese philosophy. That is, if the main source of disagreement between two competing and more or less equally compelling theories is their prior assumptions about truth, having concepts, or some other yet-to-be-noticed assumption, and the disagreement between these assumptions is deep and perhaps even intractable, then we ought to consider *both* as potentially valuable approaches to early Chinese philosophy rather than neither. Of course, this is not to say that anything goes in discussions of truth and Chinese philosophy. Rather, it only eliminates one criterion for assessing perspectives within the discussion—namely, whether or not they get to the truth of the matter about truth and Chinese philosophy. Of course, there is no shortage of other theoretical and philosophical constraints that we can use to assess various interpretations, such as the principles of

charity and humanity, coherence of the account, explanatory power, awareness of the historical context, explicitness in fundamental assumptions, and so on. In this way, my main goal here is not to stifle discussion about truth and Chinese philosophy, but rather to invite and encourage a plurality of approaches that can be offered in light of the issues raised below.

To this end, I will first survey a number of approaches to the question of whether or not ancient Chinese philosophers had a concept of truth. I organize this survey under the general rubric of the views being *unaccommodating* or *accommodating* to the concept of truth. I will then discuss how these views relate to the issues of what it means to have a concept and the nature of the concept of truth itself. After sketching the contours of the current debate and offering conditional assessments of some prominent accounts therein, I ultimately conclude that the question is at least temporarily unanswerable. I close by acknowledging that this seemingly unhappy conclusion in fact enables us to fruitfully consider a plurality of approaches to the question—within reasonable constraints of course—and thereby enhances rather than diminishes the discussion.

2. Unaccommodating Views

Current approaches to the issue of whether or not ancient Chinese philosophy has a concept of truth fall into two camps. In one camp are those who deny that early Chinese philosophy had a concept of truth, such as Hansen, Hall, and Ames.¹ In spite of their distinct philosophical trainings and approaches to early Chinese texts, Hansen, Hall, and Ames end up sharing the conviction that truth is among the many concepts that may be familiar to contemporary laypeople and philosophers alike but ultimately must be abandoned when engaging with early Chinese philosophy. This approach in turn enriches our appreciation of the tradition by allowing it to speak for itself and by opening up new possibilities for philosophical thinking that contrast more familiar conceptual schemes privileging the concept of truth. These and other scholars persuaded by this approach claim that instead of truth, the early Chinese philosophical tradition focused on concepts such as *Dao* 道, evaluative *shifei* (是非

¹ Don Munro and A.C. Graham expressed at the very least some skepticism about the role and importance of truth to early Chinese philosophers, claiming, for example, that, a “Chinese thinker’s regrettable lack of attention to the logical validity of a philosophical tenet is balanced by his great concern with problems important to human life,” (Munro, 1969: x). See also Graham, 1989: 3.

“this”-“not”, “right”-“wrong”) attitudes, a part-whole rather than an appearance-reality based epistemology, and many other fundamental concepts that are different in both nature and function from those with Western histories. I will call views at this end of the spectrum *unaccommodating* in so far as they believe that the early Chinese philosophical tradition does not—or even cannot—accommodate the concept of truth.

Let's look at Hansen's view first. Hansen's 1985 paper, as well as portions of his 1992 book, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, boldly argues that “[pre-Buddhist] Chinese philosophy has no concept of truth,” (Hansen 1985: 492). The paper supports this conclusion with three main points. The first is that early Chinese language and philosophy of language is overwhelmingly concerned with the pragmatic as opposed to the semantic features of language (Hansen 1992: 139). According to Hansen, language was seen as an indispensable tool used to ensure social order and encourage following the *Dao*—the comprehensive way to organize social, political, and individual life—and was not primarily seen as a means of representing reality, as is commonplace in the Indo-European tradition (Hansen 1992: 4, 16-17). As a result, the way in which early Chinese philosophers assessed language was in terms of pragmatic efficacy rather than in terms of semantic adequacy. They wondered whether names for things were expedient and acceptable, among other pragmatic considerations, rather than whether or not they accurately captured reality—a semantic consideration (Hansen 1985: 506-507). Truth, according to Hansen, is a semantic concept, focused explicitly on the relationship between language and reality, particularly the extent to which language captures or reflects reality. So for Hansen, the main focus of early Chinese philosophy of language was not to determine the grounds for making true statements, but to establish standards for using language generally in accordance with a socially-accepted *Dao* (Hansen 1985: 494-96; Hansen 1992: 143-149). The second point he makes is that the notion of semantic truth applies only to sentences. Because early Chinese philosophy of language focused mostly on the correct use of words or names (字 *zi* or 名 *ming*) and phrases or strings of names (辭 *ci*), the concept of truth is simply out of place in early Chinese philosophy, as truth is a property of sentential units (Hansen 1985: 496-500). The third point is that early Chinese philosophers, particularly the later Mohists, did indeed have ways of evaluating language using pragmatic concepts, such as the idea of terms being “acceptable” (ke 可) or “constant” (*chang* 常; Hansen 1985: 507-508),

and so there is no need for a concept of truth in our explanations of linguistic assessments in early Chinese philosophical texts.

Additionally, and perhaps equally conspicuously, David Hall and Roger Ames have argued that the early Chinese tradition does not or cannot accommodate a notion of truth. Hall and Ames' 1997 book, *Thinking from the Han*, argues that early Chinese philosophy lacked the cultural requisites for a concept of truth (Hall and Ames 1997: 124). Similar to Hansen, Hall and Ames also consider the early Chinese philosophical focus on pragmatics in language rather than semantics to preclude an interest in the concept of truth. However, they consider a broader range of early Chinese philosophical assumptions than Hansen does in order to motivate their view. They argue that early Chinese thinkers lack the requisite dichotomies of reality/appearance and theory/practice, as well as a representational theory of knowledge, for example. Without these metaphysically substantial and epistemically significant dichotomies serving as basic assumptions for early Chinese philosophers, as they have in Western traditions for millennia, early Chinese philosophers cannot have a concept—much less a theory—of truth.

However, Hall and Ames' exposition makes their final position on the topic a bit murky (Hall and Ames 1997: 143-145). In the relevant chapter's closing reflections, Hall and Ames comment on American pragmatism, noting in particular that pragmatism explicitly rejects some of the very cultural requisites for a theory of truth that they believe that early Chinese thinkers lack. Here, we find Hall and Ames admit that perhaps early Chinese thinkers actually did have a theory of truth—namely, a pragmatist one. But this does not amount to a contradiction for Hall and Ames precisely because of how radical the pragmatists' conception of truth actually is. The pragmatists self-consciously reject so much of the Western metaphysical and epistemological tradition that it in some way doesn't make sense to talk about a "pragmatist theory of truth" at all. Instead, Hall and Ames claim, "the pragmatic 'theory' of truth drawn from Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey is itself less of a theory of Truth than a vision of the Way," (Hall and Ames 1997: 145). So in spite of their concessions to pragmatism, Hall and Ames maintain that this conception of truth is so far removed from traditional

notions that it would be a mistake to claim that early Chinese philosophers had a concept of truth on the grounds that it shares broad similarities with the pragmatist “theory” of truth.

In contrast with a truth-based approach, Hansen, Hall, and Ames all afford the concept of *Dao* (“Way” 道) a privileged role in their accounts. This is indicative of a shared attitude that seeks to engage the early Chinese philosophical tradition on its own terms. Why bother worrying so much about the concept of truth, they wonder, when early Chinese philosophers were obviously concerned with *Dao* instead? Of course, the importance of *Dao* early Chinese philosophy is not really news to anyone, nor would it really be news that early Chinese philosophers focused on *Dao* rather than truth. As A.C. Graham wrote in a now oft-quoted introduction to his book *Disputers of the Tao* [Dao], “the crucial question for all of [early Chinese philosophers] is not the Western philosopher’s ‘What is the truth?’ but ‘Where is the Way?’, the way to order the state and conduct personal life,” (Graham 1989: 3). But according to Hansen, Hall, and Ames, this is not a mere expression of early Chinese philosophical interests. Rather, it is an expression of the fundamental attitudes, assumptions, and perhaps even conceptual schemes of early Chinese philosophy, which are fundamentally different from those developed in the West (Hansen 1985: 493-494). Given these basic differences in philosophical orientation between the traditions, it makes good sense to Hansen, Hall, and Ames to claim that early Chinese philosophers were interested in *Dao* instead of the truth, and that the concept of truth simply has no place in early Chinese philosophy.

More recently, Lin Ma and Jaap Van Brakel argue for an unaccommodating view on similar grounds, calling the concept of truth in interpretations of early Chinese philosophy a “transcendental pretense” (Ma and Van Brakel 2019: 21-22). They argue that projections of the concept of truth onto ancient Chinese philosophical texts are based on the mistaken assumption that truth is a universal concept that simply must exist in some form in the early Chinese tradition. However, they argue, truth and other such transcendental pretenses and subsequent projections are unjustified. We do not find any concepts of truth in ancient China in the sense of Chinese concepts that share the essence of the concept of truth. Rather, we only find concepts that share a family resemblance with the concept of truth (Ma and Van Brakel 2019: 1-4). For example, we find concepts such as *yi* 宜 “right” or “fitting”,

where the sense of rightness here is both more general and fundamental than that of truth (Ma and Van Brakel 2019: 57-66). While issues pertaining to rightness might incorporate concerns about truth, it would be a mistake to infer from this possibility that early Chinese philosophers were interested in truth as such and therefore had a concept of truth. Like Hansen, Hall, and Ames, Ma and Van Brakel hope to encourage interpreters against projecting alleged universal concepts into the early Chinese philosophical context (Ma and Van Brakel 2019: 22).

3. Accommodating Views

At the other end of the spectrum are those who hold that the early Chinese philosophical tradition does have a concept of truth. These scholars, including Bryan Van Norden, Alexis McLeod, and Bo Mou, argue that if ancient Chinese philosophy is to be considered philosophy at all, then there must be at least a thin conception of truth at work guiding its investigations (Van Norden 2007: 361-365; McLeod 2016: ix; Mou 2018: 3-10).² They argue that while it is of course important to recognize the profound differences in interests and conceptual schemes between contemporary Western philosophers and early Chinese philosophers, the concept of truth, and, in turn, a concern for the truth, are undoubtedly shared. Furthermore, to deny early Chinese philosophy the concept of truth demonstrates that our own conceptions of truth are impoverished. We must entertain the possibility that “Chinese thinkers *did* have a radically different understanding of truth”, with which we can fruitfully engage using our own conceptions (McLeod 2015: 183). In fact, if we are to understand and develop the concept of truth philosophically in a contemporary context, then we must include insights into it from the early Chinese tradition, no matter how distinct they are from modern

² Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of representatives of the accommodating view, but due to the scope of this paper, I have chosen to engage substantially only with a few prominent voices in the debate rather than offer a comprehensive literature review. That being said, it would be remiss of me not to mention Christoph Harbsmeier (1998) and Heiner Roetz (1993) as scholars directly responding to the unaccommodating view (particularly Hansen's formulation of it). The chief methodology pursued by both scholars is primarily of offering examples of sentences and concepts that readily lend themselves to truth-accommodating readings and interpretations. (See Harbsmeier 1998, 193-209; Roetz's discussion is admittedly more broad, focusing on “validity” concepts in general rather than only on truth concepts.) However, for the purpose of this discussion, what I am most interested in are the assumptions underlying such interpretations rather than the possibility or reasonableness of the interpretations themselves. In this way, while I suspect that Harbsmeier and Roetz would share many of the assumptions explicated by Van Norden, McLeod, and Mou about the concept of truth, it is these latter scholars who give such assumptions a systematic and explicit treatment that I am interested in engaging with directly here.

conceptions. I call these views *accommodating* in so far as they hold that Chinese philosophy does accommodate the concept of truth.

Alexus McLeod in *Theories of Truth in Chinese Philosophy* offers a clear account of an accommodating view. His core conviction is simple:

A concept of truth is central to the very identity of philosophy and of intellectual activity. Thus, the role of truth in philosophy is a necessary one, and we can safely assume that any philosophical tradition utilizes some concept of truth (McLeod 2016: x).

According to McLeod, insofar as Chinese philosophy is in fact philosophy, then early Chinese philosophers have a concept of truth. This is because the concept of truth arises merely from a basic attitude towards the world that takes an interest in “how things are”, a condition that Chinese philosophers clearly satisfy (McLeod 2016: ix-x).³ Granting early Chinese thinkers this thin conception of truth, therefore, is a philosophical necessity, lest we deny that early Chinese thinkers had a fundamental component of intellectual life.

His criticisms against Hansen, Hall, and Ames are more specific. Against Hansen, McLeod points out that just because early Chinese philosophies of language and epistemology were fundamentally pragmatically oriented rather than semantically oriented—if they indeed were—this does not preclude early Chinese philosophers from having a pragmatic conception of truth, as pragmatists such as Peirce and James do indeed have theories of truth, in spite of Hall and Ames’ terminological suspicion (McLeod 2016: 7, 16-19, 29). McLeod also takes issue with Hansen’s focus on the “highly idiosyncratic Mohists”, who in turn cause Hansen to misread the tradition (McLeod 2016: 19). In his discussions of Hall and Ames, McLeod levels much criticism against their idea that early Chinese philosophers lacked the distinction between appearance and reality—which he agrees is necessary for having the concept of truth—taking it instead to be something so basic and fundamental that it too would be impossible to function intellectually without (McLeod 2016: 22-24). He also takes issue with Hall and Ames’ attempt to diagnose the tradition as a whole as a monolithic

³ See also Harbsmeier 1998: 194-195 and Roetz 1993: 86-87.

entity, complaining that like Hansen, Hall and Ames take a plausible reading of one part of the tradition—namely Confucianism—and extend their conclusions to the whole of pre-Han Chinese philosophy (McLeod 2016: 25).

Bo Mou has a similar approach, though he is ultimately more conservative than McLeod in terms of the concept of truth early Chinese philosophers possessed (Mou 2015: 159-163, McLeod 2015: 180-183). He argues that people are naturally fitted with a pretheoretic “way-things-are-capturing” understanding of truth simply by virtue of being human and intellectually engaged at all (Mou 2018: 31). In this way, he believes alongside McLeod that by denying early Chinese philosophers a concept of truth, we in turn deny them a very basic feature of intellectual life. He refutes six observations that he believes informs the mistaken view that there is no concept of truth in Chinese philosophy, chief among them the claims that a concern for *Dao* precludes a concern for truth, and that a more general notion of “rightness” that excludes the concept of truth sits at the foundation of basic early Chinese epistemic assumptions (Mou 2018: 23-31). Both of these claims are mistaken because they fail to account for the fundamentality of the pretheoretic “way-things-are-capturing” concept of truth that we all share (Mou 2018: 3-8). The concept of *Dao*, as well as any other concept for a general notion of “rightness”, cannot escape the presence of the pretheoretic “way-things-are-capturing” conception of truth, as both of the former rely upon the latter for their own explanatory power. Both of these authors then go on to construct theories of truth using texts from the ancient Chinese philosophical tradition, but this part of the project comes after they have already established that early Chinese thinkers had a concept of truth. The components of these theories, therefore, cannot serve as evidence of a concept of truth, since the theories themselves assume it.

Bryan Van Norden takes a slightly different approach. His main discussion occurs alongside a discussion of the Mohists’ “three standards” (*san fa* 三法) for evaluating *yan* 言 (“sayings”, “doctrines”; Van Norden 2007: 151). The Mohists introduce these standards as a way of evaluating the specific doctrine that fate exists. If this doctrine accords with the three standards, it should be accepted and endorsed (*shi*). If it does not, then it should be rejected (*fei*). The first standard is the “root” (*ben* 本), which determines whether or not the doctrine accords with the deeds of the sage kings and the will of

Heaven. The second is the “source” (*yuan* 原), which evaluates the doctrine in terms of its agreement with people’s empirical intuitions, or “the eyes and ears of the people.” The third standard is the “use” (*yong* 用) of the doctrine, which concerns its ability to bring about benefit throughout society. So here we have a fairly systematic account of how the Mohists think we ought to evaluate language, as well as an application of it for a specific end—namely, for evaluating whether or not fate exists.

Van Norden takes these three standards to be tests for truth (Van Norden 2007: 151-161). His main interpretive opponent here is Hansen, who argues that the three standards are tests of the pragmatic efficacy of the doctrine that there is fate rather than the truth of the doctrine. According to Hansen, it doesn’t really matter to the Mohists whether or not the doctrine is true. What actually matters is if it accords with the sage kings, if people in general believe it, and if promulgating it promotes benefit. Van Norden argues that this is mistaken. He claims that while the Mohists may very well be concerned with these issues, they were also, simultaneously concerned with the truth of the doctrine that there is fate (Van Norden 2007: 153). In particular, although the three standards don’t serve as a definition of truth—which the Mohists never saw themselves as providing—they are nevertheless indicators of truth (Van Norden 2007: 160-161). So the Mohists have a concept of truth.

His more general arguments about truth resemble McLeod’s and Mou’s, the main idea being that we must accept that early Chinese thinkers had truth in a *thin* sense even they do not offer any familiar *thick* accounts of truth (Van Norden 2007: 362). According to Van Norden, to be said to have a thin conception of truth, one only needs to have a concept that corresponds to the predicate “is true” in the biconditional, “‘S’ is true if and only if S.” The Mohists indeed have such a concept: *ran* 然, often translated as “so”. So when Mozi claims that the gentlemen of the world “take my statements to be not-so” (*yi wu yan wei bu ran* 以吾言為不然), he is really claiming that the gentlemen of the world take his statements to be untrue. So again, the Mohists had a concept of truth (Van Norden 2007: 372-373). Van Norden further criticizes Hansen, Hall, and Ames for approaching the texts with too robust a theory of truth to begin with, claiming that it should come as no surprise that early Chinese philosophers did not have a Russellian correspondence theory of truth, for example (Van Norden 2007: 362-363). It is clearly a mistake to treat the absence of a particular thick conception of truth as

evidence that early Chinese philosophers lack a thin conception. Furthermore, he thinks we would be mistaken to take “Chinese thinkers to be providing rational arguments for the truth of the claims that they advance,” were there not at least a thin conception of truth guiding all early Chinese philosophical endeavors (Van Norden 2007: 362). In this way, if we do not attribute to early Chinese thinkers a thin conception of truth, then we cannot possibly make sense of their philosophical projects at all.

There are other accommodationists who don't focus as much on early Chinese thinkers' implicit reasoning, nor do they treat truth as a fundamental, universal concept. Regarding the Mohists again, Chris Fraser argues that the three standards, while not being standards of truth in and of themselves, “do not preclude a concern with truth, and their scope probably covers questions of truth,” (Fraser 2012: 352). This view seems weaker than Van Norden's, but also directly contradicts Hansen's, which treats the three standards in Mohism as being entirely pragmatic evaluators of *yan*. Additionally, for the Later Mohists, who also explicitly deal with linguistic evaluation, Fraser argues that the texts “can justifiably be said to have a concept of semantic truth,” (Fraser 2012: 352). Loy Hui-Chieh similarly argues that Mohist thought has the resources to offer evaluations that can be understood, with qualifications, as those of the truth or falsity of statements, particularly in the context of the second of the Mohists' three standards (Loy 2008; Loy 2011). According to Loy, this standard, the eyes and ears of the people, “is best seen as meant for evaluating factual claims,” (Loy 2008: 459). Frank Saunders Jr. also argues that for the later Mohists, there is surely a concern with semantics as well as pragmatics, and even a tacit acknowledgement of this distinction within later Mohist writings (Saunders Jr 2014). However, he resists the claim that this amounts to having a concept of truth; though with so much ground already ceded to the accommodationists, perhaps he should accept it, as McLeod (2016: 73-75) suggests. Erica Brindley in a recent article further explores the Later Mohists' concerns with semantic adequacy and truth, in particular their use of disputation (*bian* 辯) as a means of evaluating language practices as well as truth-claims in the phenomenal world (Brindley 2020).

In spite of these concessions, however, many of these scholars share an overall skepticism concerning the utility of the concept of truth in our interpretations of early Chinese philosophical texts more generally. Their form of accommodationism is altogether weaker than Van Norden's, McLeod's, and Mou's. They accept the claim by Hansen, Hall, and Ames—as well as A.C. Graham—that by and large, early Chinese philosophers were not interested in the concept of truth; they were interested in *Dao*, among other concepts at home in the tradition.⁴ However, these authors also accept that certain carefully read sections of the *Mozi* provide strong evidence that the Mohists at least had a concept of truth, and used it in their theories. Claims about the whole of early Chinese philosophy, or the nature of the concept of truth, are largely absent from these discussions.

4. On “Having a Concept”

There is quite a bit of equivocating going on in this debate. We say that we are interested in whether or not early Chinese philosophers “have a concept” of truth, but the standards for what it means to “have a concept” vary significantly. Unsurprisingly, those at the accommodating end of the spectrum tend to have a lower standard for having a concept of truth than do those at the unaccommodating end. For example, Van Norden, McLeod, and Mou believe that all it takes to have a concept of truth is to care about getting things right about the world when we use language, or some similar epistemic attitude, while Hansen, Hall, and Ames think that some more robust set of epistemic and metaphysical assumptions is needed. Of course, the disagreement equally hinges on each thinker's operative conception of truth. But before turning to this issue, I'd like to focus on the difference between the implicit theories of having a concept at work here.

In contemporary philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science, theories of concepts and concept possession generally fall into two camps: the representational and the epistemological. The representational theory of concepts holds that concepts are mental representations, and that possessing a concept just means possessing that mental representation, or at least the ability to possess it at will (Fodor 1998: 3). What's meant by “representation” here has changed considerably

⁴ Harbsmeier (1998: 93-94) admits a version of this claim as well, though he also thinks that unaccommodationists, particularly Don Munro, are mistaken in overstating it.

over time. While early proponents of the view such as John Locke and David Hume believed representations to be akin to mental images, contemporary approaches argue that representations function more like language and possess a compositional semantics (Margolis and Laurence 2019: §1.2). The upshot of the view is just that what it means to have a concept is fundamentally a psychological matter. Whether or not you have a concept depends on what you are able to think about—that's it (Fodor 2004: 31). So long as you can mentally represent the concept to yourself—however we understand “represent”—you have that concept. The alternative view takes concept possession to be an epistemic matter, whereby having a concept is akin to possessing an epistemic ability to make certain inferences and identify instantiations of that concept (Dummett 1993). In this way, it doesn't matter whether or not you can represent anything in your mind; what matters is what you can epistemically *do* with the concept.⁵ For our purposes, on the psychological view, early Chinese philosophers would need to be able to represent truth to themselves, as such, in order to have the concept, while on the epistemological view, they would need to be able to make inferences regarding truth and sort instances of truth from non-truth, among exhibiting other epistemic abilities. Now when scholars claim that early Chinese philosophers did or did not have a concept of truth, we can wonder which theory of concept they have in mind, and whether or not their ascription of the concept succeeds or fails.

Let's first examine the psychological view. In order to count as having a concept of truth on this view, early Chinese philosophers would need to be able to represent the concept to themselves and think about truth as-such. If there is no evidence that they did, then there is no evidence to support the claim that they had a concept of truth. Furthermore, according to this view, we should be fairly restrictive on what counts as evidence for having the concept of truth due to the abstract nature of the concept of truth. Only linguistic evidence is admissible, as the written words and phrases in the texts themselves are the only records of early Chinese mental representations on this topic that we

⁵ Philosophers also talk about a third view which treats concepts as abstract objects, such as the view of Christopher Peacocke (1992). However, given that Peacocke believes that concepts are individuated on the basis of their *informativeness*, his view is still an epistemological account of concepts, even if the metaphysics and ontology is different (Peacocke 1992: 2).

have.⁶ In this way, we cannot argue, as McLeod does, that early Chinese epistemic practices are sufficient for ascribing early Chinese philosophers a concept of truth. We need to see a *word* for truth, or at least a co-referential description of truth in order to support the claim that early Chinese thinkers had the concept. Contra McLeod, it is not possible on this view to have a concept of truth “whether explicit or not” (McLeod 2016: x).

In this way, we should perhaps follow Fraser, Loy, and even Van Norden instead of Mou and McLeod, as the former authors rely on explicit linguistic evidence of truth concepts within the Chinese tradition. The concept of “fitting” (*dang* 當), the second of the three Mohist standards, or even the Mohist three standards themselves—if these are representations of the concept of truth, then it makes sense to think that the Mohists had the concept of truth. Insofar as the Mohists were explicitly engaged in theorizing about *dang* and the three standards, they may be said to have mental representations of the concept of truth, even though the mode of presentation in each case differs. Relatedly, other terms such as *ran* 然 (“so”), and *shi* 是 (“this”, “right”) are used in semantic appraisals in a number of early Chinese texts (Fraser 2020: 119-125; Van Norden 207: 372-373). Xunzi, for example, frequently expresses disagreement with an opposing view, which is quoted or explained in the preceding lines, by claiming “this is not so” (*shi bu ran* 是不然), which quite naturally can be understood as an evaluation of the truth of the preceding claims (XZ 18/1, 23/51, 23/37, 32/27).⁷ Similarly, the later Mohist writing, the “Lesser Selection” twice uses the phrase “thus and so” (*shi er ran* 是而然) to evaluate strings of statements, where they are clearly being evaluated on the grounds of their logical and semantic properties (Graham 2003: 485). So again it makes sense to think of these as evaluations of the truth of the statements in question. And in so far as these thinkers had the concepts of *shi* and *ran*, and that these concepts are identical to the concept of truth, then it seems that Xunzi and the Mohists indeed had the concept of truth. And furthermore, so too did all competent speakers of ancient Chinese by means of the words *shi*, *ran*, and *dang*.

⁶ “On this topic” is an important caveat, since not all evidence of mental representation of a concept is linguistic. One may have a concept of water, for example, without having a word for it, so long as one’s mental state is appropriately related to water in the world. However, for abstract concepts—quarks, truth, justice—we cannot make the same assumption. This concern relates to Van Norden’s lexical fallacy, which I address below.

⁷ References to the *Xunzi* utilize Harvard-Yenching concordance Book/Line numbers, which can be input at <http://ctext.org/xunzi>.

The epistemological account of concepts gives us different and inconclusive results. It also seems to be tacitly endorsed by participants in this debate. Consider Hansen's project. He believes that in order to determine whether or not early Chinese thinkers had a concept of truth, we must look at their epistemic practices. "A concept is a role in a theory," he writes, so if there is no role for a concept of truth in early Chinese epistemic theories, then there's no concept of truth (Hansen 1985: 392). Insofar as early Chinese—or at least Mohist—theories and epistemic practices have no role for the concept of truth, and their theories can be fully explained without the concept of truth, we can claim that early Chinese thinkers had no such concept. Van Norden's discussion of the lexical fallacy similarly focuses on epistemic practices rather than linguistic representations, though he of course arrives at the opposite conclusion. According to Van Norden, one commits the lexical fallacy when one infers from the absence of a word the absence of the corresponding concept (Van Norden 2007: 21-22). This is important to Van Norden's project of arguing that early Confucian philosophers were virtue ethicists even though there was no word in ancient China that can perfectly map on to contemporary conceptions of "virtue." For a more everyday example, Van Norden mentions "aglets"—the plastic tips of shoelaces—and claims that while most people probably don't know the English name for those plastic tips, they nevertheless have the concept of aglets (Van Norden 2007: 21-23). Having the concept is understood as having the ability to identify aglets when you come across them, to notice when they fall off, etc., regardless of whether you know the (or any) name for them. In this way, Van Norden, like Hansen, believes that in order to figure out which concepts someone has, one must look at their epistemic practices rather than at their mental representations alone.

So then the crucial question becomes whether or not early Chinese epistemic practices are indicative of having a concept of truth. Hansen says they aren't, while Van Norden (and Mou and McLeod, for that matter) says they are. However, as we can see, the epistemic account of concept possession actually gives us two different results, and I suggest we explain this difference in terms of whether we are focused on early Chinese philosophers' *explicit* or *implicit* epistemic practices.

If we focus on their explicit epistemic practices—that is, those they describe in their writings and constitute their epistemologies—the evidence only supports the claim that there were some

concepts that sometimes overlap with truth—namely, those we have already discussed including *dang* and *ran*. In this way, the concept of truth fares no better than it does on the representational view. One potential worry though is that these may not be truth concepts according to the epistemic view. This is because according to epistemic theories, concept individuation only requires that a concept play a different epistemic role from another concept in order to count as a separate concept even if the conceptual contents (or referents) are identical.⁸ Because H₂O, for example, plays a different epistemic role than water—namely, none at all until people discovered that water is H₂O—they are different concepts. Similarly, because *dang* plays a different epistemic role from truth, the two are different concepts, *even if* there are occasions on which *dang* can be translated as “is true,” and *even if*, contra Ma and Van Brakel, the essence or abstract content qua referent of that concept and truth is identical. In fact, epistemic approaches to concepts are supposed to explain *why* concepts with the same referent are distinct, and it is precisely because they play different epistemic roles. So even if the explicit practices support the idea that early Chinese philosophers have a number of concepts *similar to* the concept of truth, they are distinct concepts. How similar these concepts end up being depends upon our views on the concept of truth. And of course, this result does not rule out the possibility of learning from these truth-like concepts even though it stops short of claiming that they are in fact truth concepts.

But suppose we focus instead on their *implicit* epistemic practices. Suppose we agree with McLeod, Van Norden, and Mou that anybody of a certain linguistic and intellectual level has a general desire to “get things right” with their use of language, their beliefs, etc., and follows certain epistemic practices with that end in mind. Insofar as early Chinese thinkers exhibit these epistemic tendencies, and insofar as our operative conception of truth is sufficiently thin, they can be said to have the concept of truth. However, it is not entirely clear that we can infer from the existence of a concept of truth on the basis of *implicit* epistemic practices an *explicit* interest in the concept of truth as such. In other words, we may wonder if having a concept of truth on the basis of implicit epistemological

⁸ Consider Peacocke's claim that, “Concepts *C* and *D* are distinct if and only if there are two complete propositional contents that differ at most in that one contains *C* substituted in one or more places for *D*, and one of which is potentially informative while the other is not,” (Peacocke 1992: 2). Being “informative” or not is of course an epistemic standard.

practices necessitate that all (or most) explicit epistemological and linguistic theories are expressions theories of truth. McLeod and Mou seem to think so, but I suspect that other accommodationists (and certainly unaccommodationists) would think not. If we allow this inference, then perhaps the early Chinese tradition is replete with theories of truth. Conversely, if we cannot make this inference, then it seems that although the concept of truth is indicated by widespread epistemic practices, early Chinese philosophers were overwhelmingly uninterested in giving accounts of those practices, save for in special cases that accommodationists such as Fraser, Loy, Saunders Jr. and Brindley note. So this leaves open the possibility that early Chinese thinkers had a concept of truth, but didn't focus on it very much.

At this point we have reached the unhappy intermediate conclusion that whether or not early Chinese philosophers have a concept of truth depends upon the truth of one or another theory of having a concept. A representational theory yields a modest conclusion for an accommodating approach, while an epistemological theory yields mixed results, depending upon whether we focus on implicit or explicit epistemological practices, as well as the relationship between them.

5. Is Truth a Fundamental Concept?

But there is another dimension to this debate having to do with the concept of truth itself. In particular, a great deal seems to turn on whether or not truth is, as McLeod, Mou, and Van Norden hold, a fundamental concept that we can reasonably ascribe to early Chinese thinkers, or if it is something more parochial, as Hansen, Hall, and Ames hold. On the one hand, you might think that truth is a foundational, "bedrock", or "primitive" philosophical concept, one that does not admit of any further analysis, and one for which the standard of possessing it is very low (Asay 2013: 3). What that standard is can vary depending upon your theory of truth. For McLeod, Van Norden, and Mou, the standard is having a certain kind of pre-theoretical attitude interested in getting things right about the world with one's beliefs and language usage. Alternatively, you might think that truth is an omnipresent conceptual primitive that pervades all of our judgments wholly independent of our pre-theoretic intuitions and attitudes (Asay 2013: 148-158). According to both kinds of view, it is not merely likely, but even necessary that early Chinese thinkers had the concept. On the other hand, you might

think that truth is tied to philosophical assumptions and priorities alien to the ancient Chinese philosophical context, and so is something more provincial. It may not be quite as parochial as Hansen, Hall, and Ames make it out to be, and the standards for having it might not be quite as high as they claim, but it is by no means a conceptual necessity that all intellectual traditions, including that of ancient China, have it.

Let's suppose that truth is a fundamental concept. It is found in all cultures, languages, and intellectual traditions. Furthermore, it is found in those contexts whether the participants themselves know it or not. It is a transcendental concept in so far as it is one of the conditions for the possibility of language usage and normal human psychology. From this, we can derive a few significant consequences for the purposes of interpreting early Chinese philosophy. In the first place, this view means that nothing within Chinese philosophy really matters to the concept of truth. The issue has been settled at the conceptual level, and no evidence, interpretation, or anything from the early Chinese tradition could falsify the claim that truth is fundamental—save of course for a hitherto undiscovered, explicit, and compelling argument in ancient China against the idea that truth is a fundamental or primitive concept. Otherwise, whether or not early Chinese philosophers had the concept is completely independent of anything they actually believe or theorized about.

In the second place, the fundamentality of the *concept* of truth does not vindicate McLeod, Van Norden, and Mou's approach regarding early Chinese epistemological and philosophical *theories*. Perhaps early Chinese thinkers had a concept of truth, as does every competent natural language user, but their theories of language did not focus much on truth. Instead, they focused on *Dao*. This is entirely possible, as the mere existence of a concept in an intellectual tradition does not necessitate that the concept was important or interesting to the thinkers within that tradition. Consider the Mohists. I confess that I see nothing wrong with simultaneously claiming, contra Hansen, that the early Mohists had a concept of truth in a nominal, thin sense, and that the theory of the three standards they offer does not, contra Van Norden and McLeod, constitute a theory of truth, and is instead a theory of pragmatic standards of how to use language. But McLeod and Van Norden resist this possibility. They argue that if truth is a universal concept, ascribable to all intellectual traditions

in at least a thin sense, then we can infer that the Mohists' explicit—even if pragmatic—account of language use is offering a theory of truth. This doesn't follow. It should be possible to have the rules of a language game be independent from the concept of truth; otherwise, all sorts of language games would have to count as theories of truth for all those who have the concept of truth. While it is of course possible that Van Norden and McLeod are right that the three standards do constitute a theory of truth, it is at least possible that they do not. Perhaps they are more pragmatic in nature to the exclusion of semantic concerns, as Hansen argues, and are instead more like the rules of sports or etiquette. And this possibility remains whether or not truth is a universal concept, ascribable to all. In fact, if we assume that truth is a fundamental or primitive concept, the dialectical landscape doesn't change much at all. Even if Hansen, Hall, and Ames could admit that early Chinese thinkers had a concept of truth, their account of early Chinese epistemologies, philosophies of language, the overwhelming focus on *Dao*, and so on, would still be plausible. So in this way, a theory of truth where it is fundamental or primitive would indeed secure McLeod, Van Norden, and Mou a modest victory, though perhaps not of the kind they seek.

However, the possibility remains that a conception of truth as a thin, fundamental, primitive concept *does* justify reading early Chinese theories at a higher level in terms of truth, though this approach has not, to my knowledge, been pursued in the literature. Consider deflationist or minimalist accounts of truth, which hold that there is no substantive property of truth shared by all true sentences (Horwich 1990: 1-13). Rather, the concept of truth is exhausted by biconditionals of the form “*S* is true *iff* *S*,” where “is true” does not denote a real property in the sense that predicates denoting real properties such as “is red” do (Horwich 2013: 112). The truth conditions of “*S*” are simply *S*. But what, then, is so special about the concept of truth? Some deflationists suggest that it is a disquotational tool, an anaphorically unrestricted quantifier that enables us to engage in “blind ascriptions,” which assign “truth values to sentences, or classes of such, which we can not exhibit explicitly,” (Azzouni 2001: 1). That is, truth is not a metaphysically substantive property possessed by truth bearers, but is instead an expressive device that enables us to say things like, “The next thing Mei says will be true,” without actually repeating what Mei says or even knowing what she will say. If we combine this view with one about the omnipresence of the concept of truth, we have a view that

holds that anything playing this disquotational role for truth-bearers is a concept of truth, whether or not the users of that language had mastery of the concept in general or even a word for it (Asay 2013: 154-164).

On this view, the early Chinese tradition is replete with truth concepts, and, by implication, accounts of those concepts are accounts of truth concepts. As we have seen, for example, *ran* plays exactly this role in later Mohist writings, endorsing a series of interesting statements without repeating them. However, *ke* seems to function like this as well. Consider *Mengzi* 1A/7 when King Xuan asks Mengzi “Is it possible for someone like me to protect the people?” to which Mengzi responds, “*ke*” (“It’s possible”), which we can understand as Mengzi endorsing what Xuan has just said without actually repeating it. In fact, this disquotational practice is ubiquitous throughout Chinese language ancient and modern alike, though the disquotation device itself varies from statement to statement. While *ke*, *ran*, and *shi* are all fairly widespread, none is seen as a universal or fundamental disquotational tool such as truth. Rather, each is only contextually appropriate, much like in the case of modern Chinese. It is perfectly acceptable to repeat a term in a yes or no question in offering an answer. In modern Chinese, to the question, “Are you hungry?”, the natural answer would be “hungry” or “not hungry”, rather than more general semantic equivalents to “yes” or “no”. In ancient Chinese too, there does not seem to be any single term that early Chinese thinkers saw as playing a universal disquotational role like truth does, but the widespread practice of disquotational assent is indicative already of a concept of truth.

Note that this approach is immune to Hansen’s insistence that the emphasis on the pragmatic rather than the semantic features of language precludes us from considering *ke* and others to be truth concepts. While Hansen (1985: 494) himself admits that there are cases where translating such words as “true” would be functionally acceptable, doing so would nevertheless be misleading due to the overwhelmingly pragmatic understanding of language. But if we have a deflationist or minimalist conception of truth, then the very practice of disquotational assent already passes the threshold. We need only see evidence that early Chinese thinkers held something like the following: “It’s possible for Xuan to protect the people” is *ke* if and only if it’s possible for Xuan to protect the people. This seems

trivially correct in the early Chinese context, but there are implications here for truth. If the *ke* conditions are the same as truth-conditions, and the quoted language is a truth-bearer, then *ke* is a concept of truth no matter any additional analysis of *ke*. Furthermore, any additional analysis of *ke* within the tradition would count as a theory of truth. Of course, this approach depends entirely upon the plausibility of minimalist accounts of truth, about which there is currently much debate. But if it is plausible, then it provides us with a fairly straightforward path from the fundamentality of truth to theories of truth in Chinese philosophy as pursued by Van Norden, McLeod, and Mou.

It is possible of course that the deflationary account of truth is wrong, and that truth is not a fundamental or primitive concept. Rather, it is instead a concept that has grown out of philosophical concerns that are unique to a particular vein of Western philosophical thought. Unaccommodationist approaches seem to rely upon this being the case, and indeed it would seem to lend credence to their theories. However, just like for Van Norden, McLeod, and Mou, it would not vindicate unaccommodating interpretations entirely. For it is possible that truth, even in its more thin and general forms, is unique to Western philosophical contexts, and also that early Chinese thinkers arrived at it. We must accept the possibility that ideas may evolve convergently and without a shared conceptual core, just as various organisms throughout history have settled upon similar body plans for survival without sharing a direct ancestor (Siderits 2015: 79-80). Weaker accommodationist views such as Fraser's seem to accept this possibility concerning certain words and concepts functioning like truth within the tradition—*dang*, *ran*, and the like—demonstrating that an explicit concern with a language-to-world relationship was indeed part of at least some early Chinese philosophers' programs. Nevertheless, this does not necessitate that the concept of truth is fundamental or universal.

Though the possibility that truth is not a necessary, fundamental concept does not on its own vindicate unaccommodationist readings, it does make them more tenable by eliminating a major line of attack from the accommodationists regarding the necessity of truth in any explanation of early Chinese thought. Furthermore, it allows for the possibility that certain truth-like concepts in early Chinese thought may have convergently evolved within the context of a fundamentally pragmatic approach to mind, world, and language, and that early Chinese truth-like concepts can be explained

in the tradition's own non-truth-theoretic terms, as Hansen, Hall, and Ames attempt to do. Consider contemporary programs broadly within the pragmatist tradition that seek to do exactly this. Philosophers such as Huw Price, Robert Brandom, and Simon Blackburn tend to eschew semantic concepts (such as truth) as explanatory primitives, opting instead to explain the use of language in terms of pragmatic concepts (Price 2013; Brandom 2013; Blackburn 2013). According to such programs, the pragmatic use of language explains the meaning of words, and not the other way around (Williams 2013: 128). If such explanations of semantic concepts, including truth, prove to be fruitful in contemporary contexts, and if the early Chinese philosophical tradition is itself overwhelmingly focused on the pragmatic features of language, as unaccommodationists and weaker accommodationists alike seem to think, then it should be at least possible to offer pragmatic explanations of truth-like concepts found in early China. Perhaps we should not take representationalist, semantic, and truth-theoretic language as primary, but instead focus on how the pragmatic features of language explains them. So long as truth is not a fundamental, bedrock, or primitive concept, this possibility remains, and so too does it remain as a way of explaining early Chinese philosophical thought without the concept of truth.

6. Concluding Remarks

At first, this debate appeared to be over competing interpretations of Chinese philosophy: those according to which there exist one or more truth concepts within Chinese philosophy, and those according to which there are no such concepts within Chinese philosophy. But oddly enough, the thorniest issues in this debate have little to do with Chinese philosophy. Most of the scholars addressing this issue are in broad agreement interpretively, sharing a plethora of background assumptions regarding crucial material in the texts, such as the importance of *Dao*, evaluative terms such as *shifei* and *ke-buke*, and early Chinese argumentative strategies. What these authors really seem to disagree about is what it means to have a concept, and the fundamentality of the concept of truth. Once we settle these issues, we will have our answer to whether or not early Chinese philosophers had a concept of truth. But this is not very good news, since it means that we won't be able to come to an agreement on an interpretation of Chinese philosophy until we come up with the correct theories of

concept possession and truth. That is, we can't answer the empirical question of whether or not there exists a concept of truth in early China without first settling these other issues, and it doesn't seem like these issues will be settled anytime soon.

But as mentioned at the outset, this need not imply that we should not, much less cannot, fruitfully discuss truth and Chinese philosophy. To the contrary, it implies instead that there are at least as many ways to responsibly and meaningfully discuss truth and Chinese philosophy as there are such ways to discuss the concept of truth itself. So what we lose by giving up the quest for the right interpretation about truth and Chinese philosophy, we make up for with the plurality of approaches that we can now consider, knowing that the ultimate correctness of each approach is at least in part contingent on prior assumptions that we cannot at present assess. Of course, this is not an invitation to simply say whatever we like about truth and Chinese philosophy. Rather, it is a plea to eliminate one standard of evaluating such discussion contributions—namely, whether or not they get the right answer to the empirical question about truth and Chinese philosophy—while retaining plenty of others, such as theoretical parsimony, coherence, historical plausibility, charity and humanity in interpretive reconstructions, explanatory power, and even philosophical fruitfulness, to name a few. Such interpretive constraints are more than sufficiently robust to successfully guide future discussions on this topic, regardless of which theories of concept possession and of truth are ultimately correct.⁹ They also are well-equipped to sustain a plurality of approaches to the topic. The main additional constraint that I am suggesting here is that assumptions about concept possession and truth in such discussions should be made explicit. So long as scholars are sufficiently clear on these issues, and so long as their discussions meet other theoretical and philosophical constraints, I see no reason why we cannot view studies from both accommodationists and unaccommodationists, however contradictory they may seem on the surface, as equally fruitful contributions to discussions about truth and ancient Chinese philosophy.

⁹ I would like to thank Eric Hutton for bringing this point to my attention.

Forthcoming in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*
Author's Preprint

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Chris Fraser, Eric Hutton, Jamin Asay, and Manuel Rivera Espinoza for their helpful comments on previous versions of this paper. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments as well, which undoubtedly helped to improve the paper.

References

- Asay, Jamin. (2013). *The Primitivist Theory of Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Azzouni, Jody. (2001). Truth via anaphorically restricted quantifiers. *The Journal of Philosophical Logic* 30: 329-54.
- Brandom, Robert. (2013). Global anti-representationalism? In Huw Price, *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. (2013). Pragmatism: all or some? In Huw Price, *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brindley, Erica. (2020). Capturing the world in words: Later Mohist hermeneutic theories on language and disputation. *Early China*. 1-29.
- Dummett, Michael. (1993). *The Seas of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fodor, Jerry. (1998). *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fodor, Jerry. (2004). Having concepts: a brief refutation of the twentieth century. *Mind and Language*. 19(1), 29-47.
- Fraser, Chris. (2011). "Knowledge and Error in Early Chinese Thought" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 10.2, 127-148.
- Fraser, Chris. (2020). Truth in pre-Han thought. In Yiu-ming Fung (Ed.), *The Dao Companion to Chinese Philosophy of Logic*, pp. 113-127.

Forthcoming in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*
Author's Preprint

Fraser, Chris. (2012). Truth in Mohist dialectics. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 39(3), 351-368.

Graham, Angus C. (1989). *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.

Graham, Angus C. (2003). *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* (Reprint edition with a new introduction and supplementary bibliography by Christopher Fraser). Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Hall, David and Ames, Roger. (1997). *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Hansen, Chad. (1992). *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hansen, Chad. (1985). Chinese language, Chinese philosophy, and 'truth'. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 44(3), 491-519.

Harbsmeier, Christoph. 1998. Science and Civilisation in China, Vol. 7, Part 1: Language and Logic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horwich, Paul. (2013). Naturalism, deflationism and the relative priority of language and metaphysics. In Huw Price, *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horwich, Paul. (1990). *Truth*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Loy, Hui-chieh. (2008). Justification and debate: Thoughts on Moist moral epistemology," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 35(3), 455-71.

Loy, Hui-chieh. (2011). The Word and the Way in Mozi. *Philosophy Compass*. 6.10 (2011), 652-62.

Ma, Lin and Van Brakel, Jaap. (2019) *Beyond the Troubled Water of shifei: From Disputation to Walking-Two-Roads in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Forthcoming in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*
Author's Preprint

Margolis, Eric and Laurence, Stephen. (2019). Concepts, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
(Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

McLeod, Alexis. (2015). Replies to Brons and Mou on Wang Chong and Pluralism. *Comparative
Philosophy*. 6(1), 169-184.

McLeod, Alexis. (2016). *Theories of Truth in Chinese Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*. London:
Rowman and Littlefield International.

Mou, Bo. (2015). Rooted and rootless pluralist approaches to truth: two distinct interpretations of
Wang Chong's account. *Comparative Philosophy*. 6(1), 149-168.

Mou, Bo. (2018). *Semantic-Truth Approaches in Chinese Philosophy: A Unifying Pluralist Account*.
Lanham: Lexington Books.

Munro, Don. (1969). *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Peacocke, Christopher. (1992). *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Price, Huw. (2013). Prospects for global expressivism. In Huw Price, *Expressivism, Pragmatism and
Representationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roetz, Heiner. 1993. "Validity in Chou Thought." In H. Link and G. Paul, eds., *Epistemological Issues in
Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press

Saunders, Jr, Frank. (2014). Semantics without truth in Later Mohist philosophy of language. *Dao* 13,
215-229.

Schroeder, Mark. (2010). *Being-for: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*. New York: Oxford
University Press

Siderits, Mark. (2017). Comparison or confluence in philosophy? In Jonardon Ganeri *The Oxford
Handbook of Indian Philosophy*. New York: Oxford.

Forthcoming in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*
Author's Preprint

Van Norden, Bryan. (2007). *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*. New York:
Oxford University Press.