ARGUING ABOUT KNOWLEDGE IN ANCIENT CHINA

Fenrong Liu
Tsinghua and Amsterdam
FOCUS: THREE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Confucianism: Xunzi

Daoism: Zhuangzi

Mohism: Mozi
EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES AND THEIR ARGUMENT

1. Knowledge, belief, and evidence
2. Various notions of knowledge: knowing that; knowing how; knowing things
3. Criteria and sources of knowledge
4. Relation between names and objects/reality
5. Skepticism; learning
WAKING AND DREAM

We dream of banqueting and at dawn wail and weep, dream of wailing and weeping and at dawn go out to hunt. While we dream we do not know we are dreaming, and in the middle of a dream interpret a dream within it; not until we wake do we know that we were dreaming. Only after the ultimate awakening shall we know that this is the ultimate dream. Yet fools think that they are awake, so confident that they know what they are, princes, herdsman, incorrigible! You and Confucius are both dreams, and I who call you a dream am also a dream. (Zhuangzi)
If this is the case, then how does one clearly distinguish these theories? Master Mo Zi spoke, saying:``you must establish standards. To speak without standards is like using the upper part of a potter’s revolving wheel to determine the direction of the sunrise and subset. The distinction between right and wrong, between benefit and harm cannot be achieved and clearly known. Therefore, theories must have three criteria.”
What are three criteria? Master Mo Zi spoke, saying: ``There is the foundation; there is the source; there is the application. In what is the foundation? The foundation is in the actions of the ancient sage kings above. In which is the source? The source is in the truth of the evidence of the eyes and ears of the common people below. In what is the application? It emanates from government policy and is seen in the benefit to the ordinary people of the state. These are what are termed the ‘three criteria’.” (Mozi)
South of the mouth of the Xia River there was a man called Juan Juliang, In disposition he was stupid and very fearful. When the moon was bright he was walking in the dark, He looked down, saw his shadow the thought is was a ghost following him. He looked up, saw his hair and thought is was a standing ogre. He turned around and ran. When he got to his house he lost his breath and died. (Xunzi)

“yiwei” in Chinese often expresses one’s belief
PLAN

Times of the lectures:
Jan 8: 11:00am-1:00pm
Jan 9: 2:00-4:00 pm
Jan 10: 2:00-4:00 pm
Jan 11: 2:00-4:00 pm
Jan 12: 2:00-4:00 pm

Location (F2.19, SP107, ILLC)

Final paper: 10-15 pages, on a topic to be assigned during the lectures. Depending on students’ background, it can be a paper e.g., on comparing Chinese ideas with western philosophy.
WELCOME TO ANCIENT TIMES!

WELCOME TO CHINESE PHILOSOPHY!

ANY QUESTIONS, EMAIL: FENRONGUVS@GMAIL.COM