Dao (2011) 10:311–340
DOI 10.1007/s11712-011-9228-z

Xunzi as a Semantic Inferentialist: *Zhengmin*, *Bian-Shuo* and *Dao-Li*

Lin Chung-I

Published online: 13 July 2011

Abstract This essay argues that the idea of name-rectification (*zheng ming* 正名) in the *Xunzi* can be properly reconstructed as revealing a normative pragmatic semantic theme that linguistic contents embody, and are embedded in, the normative, justificatory network, or pattern, of *dao li* 道理 (proper routes/patterns of norm) which, in turn, is constituted and manifested by social inferential justificatory practices of *bian shuo* 辯說 (dialectical justification/explanation).

Keywords Xunzi · Name-rectification · Semantic inferentialism

1 Introduction

The text of the *Xunzi* does not give much away concerning the main theme of rectifying names (*zhengming* 正名) and is certainly far from transparent and fully explicit. However, I shall venture on arguing that it still reveals a *normative pragmatic semantic* theme that linguistic contents embody, and are embedded in, the normative, justificatory network, or pattern, of *daoli* 道理 (proper routes/patterns of norm) which, in turn, is constituted and manifested by social inferential justificatory practices of *bianshuo* 辯說 (dialectical justification/explanation). More particularly, I propose first that name-rectification in the *Xunzi* is indited of social justificatory activities that possess the dual function of endowing names with content (*shi* 實) and making semantic content explicit, and second that semantic contents should be conceived as norms, the totality of which constitutes the normative pattern of *daoli*.[1]

[1]Customary translation of *shi* is "reality." It is, however, not a germane translation. As one tries to express the idea that different names are of different *shi*, it is odd to say that different names have, or are about, different realities. "Meaning" or "reference" would be a better interpretation, since the *shi* of a term includes the thing(s) it is about. But, as we consider further that, according to Xunzi, *ming* 命 (ostensive definition) might fail linguistic understanding of names, some semantic element in addition to meaning or reference should be introduced for the notion of *shi*. In a sense, it is the main task of this essay to spell out the additional semantic element. But whatever it is, it is safe to use the vague term "content" to stand for the combination of this and other semantic elements of *shi*.

Lin Chung-I (✉)
Philosophy Department, National Chengchi University, NO.64, Sec.2, Zhinan Road, Wenshan District, Taipei City 11605 Taiwan, Republic of China
e-mail: cyberlin@nccu.edu.tw

Xunzi's thoughts on semantic content hang primarily in the specific remarks he makes about the following four topics: sensory perception, content-comprehension process of *ming-qi-shuo-bian* 命期說辨 (ostensive definition/matching linguistic definition/explanation/dialectical justification), *daoli,* and content institution of agreement-in-custom. Those on *ming-qi-shuo-bian* are explicitly about content understanding. But the remarks on all four topics can be understood as being concerned, explicitly or implicitly, with the subject of content-constitution. I shall secure my proposal by arguing that Xunzi's conceptions of content constitution and understanding would be made most transparent and comprehensible under the interpretative framework of this paper, and, conversely, that the conceptions together with their grounding texts would yield strong evidential and conceptual support to the plausibility of my proposal.

As it often turns out in the study of Chinese Classics, our work would consist of not only exegeses but also substantial reconstructions of the material available from the text of the *Xunzi*, especially those found in the chapter of "Rectification of Names." The goal is to pursue Xunzi's thoughts and arguments and to reconstruct them in a way that is both faithful to the text and brings out what is at stake in Xunzi's whole semantic project and in the particular points he makes.

2 Name-Rectification and Norm: Initial Evidence

Name-rectification plays a prominent role in Xunzi's ethics and semantics. The following impassioned passages illustrate that Xunzi takes rectification of names, content, and ethical norm as closely connected with one another:[2]

> A king sets about instituting names so that names are made fixed, and their contents are thus distinguished, *dao* prevails and then his intentions can be conveyed to others.… Hence to mince words and recklessly make up names, spoiling the rectified names…is a crime like tampering with credentials and standards of measurement. (22/108/4)

> When agreed upon names are consciously preserved…[men] do not dare to think up deviant names to spoil the rectified names, and hence will be unified in following the proper model of *dao*. Because they were like this, the achievement of the kings will be long lasting. (22/108/5-8)

Two specific points come to view. The first specifies the subject matter of rectifying names. It states that instituting names (*zhi-ming* 制名), or, for the matter at hand, preserving names (*shou-ming* 守名) or rectifying names, suffices to distinguish, and thereby define, the

[2] All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise, or when they occur as quotations within quotations. Some of my translations are modified versions of Eric Hutton's translation in his 2001, but I take full responsibility for whatever error might result from the modification. All citations to the text of the *Xunzi* are to *Xunzi* translated by D.C. Lau 劉殿爵 and CHEN Fong Ching 陳方正 (1996) and will be given in the form: chapter/page/line.

contents of various names.[3] If the institution, or the preservation, or rectification of names is carelessly executed or goes astray, names will be deprived of their right contents and thereby a crime is committed. According to this interpretation, contra most existing ones, name-rectification should be understood as a matter of semantics. It is semantic rectification of names, which is regarded as being necessary and sufficient for content-determination of names. Thus, name-rectification is not merely a pragmatic matter. Pragmatics is in fact subordinated under and underpinned by semantics for Xunzi, or so I shall argue. So the hope here is that by exploring the notion of name-rectification we may gain a deeper understanding of Xunzi's theory of meaning and his theory of language in general.

The second point depends on the *standard-tampering* remark which hints at Xunzi's conception of the very nature of linguistic content. The crime of meddling with rectified names is said to be analogous to the "crime of tampering with credentials and standards of measurement." It is a crime that not merely violates but, more radically, ruins or undermines rules by, for instance, substituting them with unjustified or unauthorized ones. Taken literally, the analogy leads to an understanding of Xunzi according to which he views the content of a name, whatever kind of name, to be rectified as a standard or norm in general. As Xunzi says, "when the preservation of names becomes lax…the names and their contents become mismatched, *the forms of right and wrong* become obscure" (22/108/9, emphasis added). Norm, as Xunzi takes it, is action guidance in the social, historical, and environmental contexts. This observation further indicates that for Xunzi there is a close connection between semantics and pragmatics.

With these initial evidences, I propose, and will vindicate further in the course of our survey, that Xunzi has in mind the semantic thesis that the practice of regulating, rectifying, or preserving names is necessary and sufficient to constitute, determine, or, at least, make explicit the contents of names. These concepts are conceived as norms, "the forms of right and wrong," or something inextricably connected to a normative network. The semantics Xunzi would endorse is a kind of *pragmatics semantics*, a conception of meaning construed in a pragmatic the foundation of which is cashed out in terms of the activities of name-rectification.[4]

3 Names and Rectifying Names

What is it that Xunzi means by *ming* 名 (name)? For different purposes, commentators have chosen among "name," "concept," "term," or "word" for the translation of *ming*. I prefer

[3] Remark on preserving names see, e.g., 22/108/7-8. Xunzi attributes the work of instituting names to kings and sages (see 22/108/4, 13-14), and, probably, preserving names to gentlemen. "Instituting names" emphasizes a function that Hangen attributes to rectifying names: On the one hand, "infusing new meaning into existing terms" (Hagen 2002:35). On the other hand, "preserving names" emphasizes the aspect of restoring the proper contents of names. Instituting names, preserving names, and rectifying names, despite their different emphases, all are the content determining and manifestation processes, so I shall distinguish them only when needed.

[4] A full-fledged pragmatic semantics explicates all key semantic notions, like truth and reference, in pragmatics terms. I am not claiming that Xunzi has proposed a detailed pragmatic semantics, but only that he has a prototype or prenatal scheme of the type.

"name," simply for the reason that it shares with *ming* its predominant vernacular meaning in contemporary Chinese. And, unlike some (see, e.g., Hansen 1989: 76), I do not think my choice, by itself, carries with it any significant philosophical burden. Some commentators read Xunzi's "name" as those that apply only to things in the factual domain, understood as the domain of nature.[5] This is, however, far from a germane reading; textual evidence shows manifestly that the referent of "name" includes names of things in the normative domain. At the very beginning of "Rectification of Names," Xunzi states how the later kings instituted four kinds of names: legal name, term of political or noble ranking and title, ritual term, and miscellaneous name (see 22/107/21-2). The first three kinds clearly apply to things in the normative domain or the domain of value. Perhaps, one might be too ready to be misled by Xunzi's frequent uses of things in the factual domain, such as birds and beasts, as examples for things with names in concern (see 22/109/9). The misconception only deepens if one takes some of Xunzi's remarks as endorsing the empiricist idea that the distinction among things rests ultimately and exclusively on the distinction among various perceptual experiences (see 22/108/14-8). But, as I should argue later, Xunzi does not support the empiricist idea.

I am open in regard to the issue of whether Xunzi's names include proper names or any other kind of term that can be turned into a noun. But it is of little doubt that he mainly applies "name" to names of general properties of human beings, including mental and behavioral ones (see 22/107/25, 22/108/2). Several kinds of names, including the seemingly most unlikely one, "miscellaneous names" (*zhaming* 雜名), clearly apply to normative items. Evidence can also be found in Xunzi's characterization of the function of name-institution: "The wise man institutes various names so that they may apply correctly to the things they designate. In this way, he makes clear, most importantly, the distinction between *noble and base*, and, at the least, discriminates the like and the unlike" (22/108/13-4, emphases added). It is to be noted that since, according to Xunzi, *ming*, i.e., naming activity in general and ostensive definition in particular, might fail to amount to understanding a name, there must be more to the content of a name than its reference. It is the contention of this essay that the content of a name is not merely its reference but also, and more fundamentally, the normative network embedding the reference. One cannot understand the content of a name, unless one grasps its reference together with the normative network holding the reference in place.

Now let us turn to the leading question of our exploration: what does Xunzi mean by "rectifying names?" Commentators have often agreed on two ideas in understanding Xunzi's account of rectification of names: The first is that name-rectification is a process of distinguishing and determining the content of names. It is hard to find any plausible alternative interpretation of the passage cited two paragraphs forward and the following remark: "A king sets about instituting names so that names are made fixed, and their

[5] See, e.g., MOU Zongsan 1953: 255 and LI Disheng 1979: 505. Hansen is a celebrated exception. He even denies that there is a clear distinction between descriptive sentences, or terms, and prescriptive ones in classic Chinese philosophy of language (CCPL). He proposes that in CCPL the descriptive is subordinated under the prescriptive (Hansen 1989: 76). This is however a misleading way to express the pragmatic emphasis in Xunzi's semantics. It is not that there is no descriptive/prescriptive distinction, but that the distinction itself must be cashed out in pragmatic terms. Neither is it that the descriptive is subordinated to the prescriptive, but that both should be explicated in pragmatic terms.

contents are thus distinguished" (22/108/4). The second is that there are two closely interrelated aspects in the rectification of names: one about logic, semantics, and argumentation, and the other of ethics, the general concern of Xunzi's teaching. As Hansen points out: "the rectification of names can be regarded as a genuine Confucian teaching *in the sense that* without it, the ethical system of Confucius would be considerably less coherent" (Hansen 1983: 181n). Interpreters differ, though, in their understanding of the nature of content determination or the connection between the semantic/argumentation and the ethical aspects. There are three accounts available on the matter and they can be dubbed as *language-refinement view*, *label-object mapping view*, and *meaning-infusion view*. Let us take each of these in turn.

Cua advocates that the logical-semantic-argumentation and the ethical aspects of name-rectification are correlated in the following way: "Rectification of terms is ultimately a matter of rectification of moral faults and misconduct and not merely a matter of avoidance of logical or linguistic errors. Thus, from the point of view of its ethical objective, the doctrine may be construed as a method for the diagnosis and remedy of moral faults" (Cua 1985: 1-2). This observation finds its origin in Chen, who suggested that Xunzi intends name-rectification to achieve "the clarification of the confusion between morally right and wrong and the remedy of moral faults" (Chen 1954: 119). "Rectifying a name" is seen pragmatically as *clarifying* or *disambiguating* the referent or meaning of a concept or term. This pragmatic interpretation is, however, at best an underestimating one, and it often leads astray an overall interpretation of Xunzi.

The names to be rectified could be conceived either as already with or without content. The term "name," by itself, allows both conceptions. But neither supports the above reading. The following text may support the no-content view of name: "Names have no predetermined appropriateness…. Names have no predetermined content. Names are instituted (infused) with contents by people's agreement, and if the agreement is abided by and has become custom, then they may be said to be contentful names" (22/109/10-1). The name/content contrast in the remark indicates that a name by itself is arbitrary in meaning and reference, and it obtains its specific meaning or reference by the process of agreement in custom. The contrast also suggests that without the undergoing content endowment process in the setting of agreement in custom, names by themselves are void of content, incapable of meaning and referring. Names in themselves are contentless things like sound tracks or dust traits.

On the no-content conception of names, the clarification-disambiguity reading of name-rectification is clearly wrongheaded. A vague term applies to a class of things with indefinite limit, and an ambiguous term has more than one sense or referent. Nonetheless they have meaning or referent. The clarification-disambiguity reading thus presupposes that names, prior to the process of rectification, already possess meaning or referent. The no-content conception of names makes more sense when applied to Xunzi's idea of name-institution, but is less helpful with respect to name-rectification. It is a more plausible and viable alternative to take names to be rectified as already carrying content. But what is the kind of content here that is in need of rectification? There are two possible answers to this question: first, vague or ambiguous content, and second, improper content. The first alternative is on a par with the clarification-disambiguity reading of name-rectification. The second alternative would opt for the reading that to rectify names is to restore the content they ought to have.

As it happens, the view that name-rectification is a way of clarifying or disambiguating names, or a way of avoiding logical or linguistic errors, belongs to the general pragmatic doctrine that name-rectification is a method of refining communication tools (mainly linguistic ones). This results in more effective diagnoses and remedies of moral faults. It certainly sounds correct that when a concept is misapplied, embedded thoughts are misconstrued, and linguistic communication, and for that matter moral teaching, are rendered ineffective, to say the least. However, the general objective of remedying moral faults would be too remote a goal for the activity of rectifying names to accomplish. This is so, if name-rectification is conceived merely as language-refinement. Without further argument, it is only safe to say that tools of communication are neutral toward both sides of ethical argumentation when moral debates arise. In fact, according to some philosophical or religious traditions such as Daoism in its standard construal, some communication tools, like language, embody something that may spoil virtues.

According to the language-refinement conception, the alleged close connection between normativity and name-rectification becomes dormant. As Chen himself writes, "with only appropriate terms, one may not make correct thoughts" (Chen 1954: 121). But if it were hard to believe that name-rectification suffices to the correctness of thought, it would be even more difficult to imagine how correct moral judgments and conducts would come from it. At this conjunction, Chen conjectures, "what Xunzi takes names to be is, in effect, something having more functions than those of concepts or terms" (Chen 1954: 121). Chen does not, however, give us any hint whatsoever as to the further functions of Xunzi's "name." In fact, even if we allow the "name" to include not only terms but, extensively, also sentences and inferences (however they are to be conceived), the name-rectification still would not show its close relation to moral rectification under the language-refinement conception.

Let us turn to the label-object mapping and meaning-infusion views. The main issue that divides these two positions is about the ontological status of the content of a name to be rectified. The former, as Hagen describes it, has it that name-rectification is a process of labeling "pre-existing and unproblematic classifications" with names (Hagen 2002: 37). The latter, on the other hand, holds that name-rectification is mainly about infusing or constructing meaning into terms for ethical or political purposes. The meaning-infusion view is mainly proposed by Hagen. Van Norden and Stalnaker might have the name-object mapping view (Van Norden 1993:376; Stalnaker 2004:57). Both views are compatible with the no-content conception of name. Strictly speaking, they are also compatible with the view that names to be rectified already possess meaning. Like the language-refinement view, labeling-object mapping view and meaning infusion view partly capture the essence of name-rectification, but miss important parts of it. Neither view offers us a semantic explanation of name-rectification that clarifies how the name-rectification process suffices for its semantic function. The lacking of a semantics presents itself in the over-emphasis of these views on the pragmatic side of name-rectification.

I confirm, though on different reasons, Hagen's observation that, contrary to the name-object mapping view, name-rectification is not merely a process of mapping names with "pre-existing and unproblematic classifications." The mapping-object

view seems to presuppose that contents of names to be rectified are not only pre-fixed but also clearly in view. There is, however, no reason to admit the presupposition. On many occasions, name-rectification is needed simply because there are symptoms, say, social chaos or moral decay, indicating that some names have improper, incomplete, or vague content. Moreover, name-rectification may be seen as the proper process of instituting or manifesting whatever content a term ought to or comes to have, and, therefore, it does not require that content be either pre-fixed or clearly in view. On some occasions, the rectification is processed by people, like the sages, who possess the epistemic privilege of having the proper contents of names clearly in view. However, it is not presupposed by, but only facilitates, the name-rectification process.

The name-object mapping picture could not be the whole story of name-rectification. As I have noted before and shall argue in the following section, the fact that according to Xunzi, *ming*, i.e., naming activity in general and ostensive definition in particular, might fall short of linguistic understanding indicates that there must be more than reference to the content of a name. The content of a name is not merely its reference but also, and more fundamentally, the normative structure underpinning its reference. Unless one has in view the background normative structure holding fast references of names, naming activities would not be effective. Hagen, insightfully, argues that rectification of names "has two sides: the name… and the actual situation (*shi*); stipulating categories, and living up to the standards set by them"; "The idea of imposing order on the world is central to the meaning and usage of *ming* [名]" (Hagen 2002: 36-37). This is an ingenious proposal. Even though it does not cash out the semantic underpinning of the name-rectification process, it, in its prospects, might avoid many pitfalls of the language-refinement view and has partially captured the content-institution aspect of name-rectification. However, as you shall find out presently, I disagree with this proposal on some crucial points. For example, contra Hagen, for Xunzi the major function of name-rectification is never limited to meaning-infusion. Meaning-manifestation, and therefore meaning-restoration, should also be part of name-rectification. Name-object mapping view has a point here.

At the current stage of our discussion, it suffices to point out that the main problem of Hagen's proposal is that it still has it that name-rectification is a matter of pragmatics. For Hagen, name-rectification is merely a means for sage-kings' moral or political projects. More specifically, the sage-kings first infuse meanings into terms, and then use them to set up norms. Pragmatic reading in general separates, conceptually, norm-institution and meaning-institution, and thereby makes it difficult to secure the supposedly close connection between name-rectification and moral-rectification.

It is true that Xunzi takes the rectification of names as a means for kings and sages to remedy moral faults or to reconstruct social-political order, but, more importantly, as I have pointed out, he sees that there is a conceptual connection between the rectification of names and the determination (and the manifestation) of the contents of norms. A view that regards the content of a term as a norm, and its rectification process as the process of determining the content it ought to have, suffices to establish a significantly strong connection between name-rectification and moral-rectification, especially when the moral faults in concern are those that generated from misunderstanding or misapplying moral rules. The conceptual connection would be this: a name is rectified *iff* the content,

therefore, the normative network, it ought to bear is determined and made explicit. The moral controversies arising from issues of what is morally good and what is not are settled when and only when norms are determined and made explicit.

There is for sure no guarantee that all sorts of moral faults will be rectified when the contents of the relevant names are determined and exhibited. There are all sorts of factors that might cause one to commit moral wrongdoings. But when what is in concern is the moral fault generated from misapplication or misunderstanding of moral norms, we might have a strong reason to believe the effectiveness of name-rectification, conceived as norm-rectification, on the matter of moral rectification. My proposal, to repeat, is that the content of a term itself is a norm or a node in a normative structure, and name-rectification is a process of determining and manifesting the content the term ought to have. Name-rectification itself is a process of norm-rectification. Hereafter, I shall continue arguing for my thesis by exploring Xunzi's other remarks on semantic content: sensory perception, *ming-qi-shuo-bian*, *daoli,* and agreement-in-custom. Since the name-rectification is seen as content institution and manifestation of names, if we achieve a clear understanding of Xunzi's ideas on the four topics, we will have a more subtle and accurate grasp of his thoughts on name-rectification.

4 Sensory Perception

Most traditional commentators have overly emphasized the quasi-empiricist perspectives of Xunzi on the survey of his semantics or philosophy of language in general. No one expresses and grasps the gem of the traditional view on the relation between Xunzi's "supposed empiricism" and philosophy of language better than Hansen. Hansen remarks:

> Xunzi's focus was pragmatic, not semantic. He argued that human sensory organs register distinctions in ways that are similar enough to provide a basis for shared conventions guiding word use. This makes social coordination of action – morality – possible. Whether or not we can prove from some absolute, natural point of view that our way of dividing and discriminating things is abstractly correct, we can establish shared conventions and the conventions provide the only relevant standard of correctness. (Hansen 1987: 327)

Hansen marks out cautiously the distinction-function of sensory organs as "a basis" for linguistic convention. But, like other commentators, he ignores an important element of Xunzi's thought on sensory perception, which is *the conceptual involvement in sensory perception through the activity of* shuo, i.e., *social justificatory practices*. The ignorance usually leads to an inadequate picture of Xunzi's semantics or philosophy of language in general.

Xunzi holds that differences among names are due to (*yuan* 緣) differences among sensory experiences. It is clear that "the difference among names" refers to the difference among their contents, but it is unclear what the "due to" means. It might mean "caused by" or "conceptually based on," or both. On both understandings though, the claim that

differences among names are due to difference among sensory experiences appears threatening to my pragmatist semantics reading. This is because on this view contents of words are ultimately based on what is given in the sensory experiences prior to any conceptual activity, including inferential practices like reasoning. I should argue that "the given" reading is inadequate and therefore presses no such a threat. On the contrary, Xunzi's overall comment on sensory perception will give crucial support to my pragmatist-inferentialist interpretation.

On what makes names different or the same, Xunzi comments:

> And on what things can be said of the same or the different? It is due to senses. Things which are of the same species and form will be perceived by the senses as being all the same things. Thus, after comparing such things with other things of a similar nature, one may settle upon a common designation. In this way they are given a common name for all the things of one class, which everyone agrees to use when the occasion demands.… Shapes, colors, and designs are differentiated by the eye.…difference of odors is made by nose…. Reason and excuse, delight and anger, sorrow and joy, love and hate, and desire are distinctions made by the mind. In addition, the mind possesses a capacity of *zhengzhi* 徵知 (attention). With *zhengzhi*, it may rely upon the ear and understand sounds correctly or rely upon the eyes and understand forms correctly. But *zhengzhi* must always wait until the reception of stimulation has to be taken via proper sensory organ, before it could have any function. Were stimulation taken in via proper senses but without further cognitive process, and were the heart to select stimulation without justification, one would be said to be ignorant. When all these have been done, we name things accordingly. (22/108/14-109/3)

The first point that appears in these remarks is that the difference among names is based on the difference manifested through senses. It is safe to say that our semantic understanding indeed grows, in part, out of a reflection on our natural awareness of the external world. But, in an orderly fashion, Xunzi proceeds further to spell out some conditions for the possibility of sense perceptions. The first condition is that for there being any sense perception, sense organs must receive stimuli prompted from the external things. Further, with different structures and functions, various sense organs passively and discriminately respond to stimuli of different kinds or ranges of things.[6] This is not really a controversial view. What is usually at issue is how this condition of sensory perception is connected with the others.

The second condition of sensory perception is the *zhengzhi* of the heart. There are various interpretations on *zhengzhi*. But, since the main points of this paper do not hang much on the notion of *zhengzhi*, I decide here to follow Chen's somehow conservative interpretation for the sake of simplicity. Following Yang, Chen sees *zhengzhi* as the selective capacity of perception, which is an active exercise rather than

[6] Xunzi defines *Tianguan* 天官 (heavenly-give organ) in "Discourse on Heaven" in the following way: "Each of the organs—ear, eyes, mouth, nose, body—has its receptive objects, and each cannot be substituted with some other. These are called one's heavenly-given organ" (17/80/9-10). That is, each sensory organ has its own kind of stimulation to take charge of, and no one can take charge of another's work. A similar view can be found in "The Way of a True King": "Just as the faculties of ear, eye, nose, and mouth cannot be substituted with one another, human affairs cannot either" (12/60/14).

a passive reception (Yang 1976: chap. 4: 4; Chen 1954:40). On this view, *zhengzhi* is an active selection of what the agent desires to know from various stimuli appearing in his sensory perception (Chen 1954: 41). In plain words, the second condition is to be understood as that without directing your attention to something you desire to perceive, you would perceive nothing: you will be looking but not seeing.

Now let's turn to the third condition: "But *zheng-zhi* must always wait until senses *dang bu qi lei* 當簿其類 (taken charge of by proper kinds) before it could have any function." Texts overwhelmingly support the interpretation of "*dang*" as "fitting." There are, however, two different takings of "*bu*": one is to see it as "taking charge"; the other, "recording." The first interpretation is more conservative but less controversial. The second interpretation will induce many unnecessary problems. Let's mention only one. If we hope to pick among our sensory organs the one that "records" or "registers" stimulation, the brain but not any sensory organ would be our best choice. Sensory organs are best seen as receivers and generators of stimulus. One can of course see brain as part of a sensory organ to avoid the choice and the interpretative problem, but this idea does not come to Chen, and certainly not to Xunzi's mind. When we see *bu* as "taking charge," we should not have this problem. So the third condition is better understood as: the reception of stimulation must be taken charge of by a proper sensory organ. In plain words, one must receive sound via ears, color via eyes, taste via tongue.

The sense of the last condition is crucial to our interpretation. It occurs in the remark that "Were stimulation taken in *via* proper senses but without further cognitive process, and were the heart to select stimulation without *shuo*, one would be said to be ignorant." Textual evidence overwhelmingly supports Cua's exegesis of *shuo* as explanation or interpretation. It is found out that there are, according to D.C. Lau's concordance, 124 entries of *shuo*. Only a handful are indeterminate in meaning; twelve of them mean "joy" or "happiness"; the rest are better understood as "thesis," "argument," "argue," "explanation," or "interpretation" (see, e.g., 5/18/23-5/19/1, 6/22/9, 18/88/12). For instance, Xunzi occasionally uses *shuo* paired with *gu* 故, which means "excuse." Consider also what Xunzi says: "*Shuo*, *gu*, delight, anger, grief, joy, dislike and like are differentiated by heart" (22/108/18-22/109/1). Since delight, grief, and dislike are opposites to anger, joy, and like respectively, it is safe to say that *shuo* is the opposite of *gu*: the former means "good reason," the latter, "mere excuse."[7] As a verb, *shuo* can thus be understood as "justify" or "articulating reason." My interpretation is compatible with Chen's, since explanation and interpretation cannot be done without reason articulation.

With an understanding of *shuo* as explanation or interpretation, Chen further articulates Xunzi's without-*shuo* remark in the following way: "What sensory

[7] I understand the "*shuo*" at 22/108/18-22/109/1 as justificatory reason. This understanding seems at odds with the fact that all terms following *shuo* and *gu* there are about emotions. One might suggest that the *shuo* should be "delight." But it must be noted that those terms about emotions come in pairs: joy-anger, sadness-happiness, and love-despise. *Gu* thus should be in contrast with *shuo*. As *shuo* is taken to be delight, it will be difficult to come by a germane exegesis of *gu*. Traditional interpreters often follow WANG Xianqian's interpretation and take *gu* here as 固, which could reasonably be understood as something opposite to delight. But, as one surveys Wang's interpretation and follows it through, it is found that the interpretation is arbitrary. *Shuo* is mainly of two meanings: reason and delight. It is not reasonable to see *shuo* as delight. Reason becomes the only reasonable option for *shuo*, and *gu* here can thus be taken as bad reason or mere excuse.

perception receives is stimulus, but what people intend to know are objects. Stimulus is initiated from objects, but they are not objects themselves. Stimulus is only a kind of sign, which we have to interpret to acquire cognition of objects…to have meaningful perception" (Chen 1954:43-44). To see sensory stimulation as a kind of sign waiting to be interpreted seems to suggest that there are two stages in the generation of sensory perception. In the first stage, stimulation of sensory organs generates something like sense data, as it is understood in contemporary epistemology or philosophy of mind. On this view, it seems that we can be directly acquainted with certain types of sensory objects, called sense data, before and independently of any of our conceptual activities. Sense data are non-conceptual, so they require interpretation to become knowledge.[8] It is well known that the notion of sense data induces many philosophical difficulties (see, as an example, Sellars 1956). There is no need to invite those difficulties into an interpretation on Xunzi. Moreover, the distinction between pre-interpretational sensory stimulus and perception generated from executing interpretation on sensory stimulation easily leads one to believe that before there is any meaningful cognition, we can already perceive stimulation. This means that it is possible to have some kind of sensory perception even before interpretation. But this consequence would contradict the without-*shuo* remark.

The fourth condition of sensory perception is *shuo*, which is a reason or reason-giving activity. A reason is a judgment, and a justification is a process of citing a judgment to support another judgment. Both reason and justification therefore involve concepts, and, thus, every *shuo* involves concepts: it is a conceptual activity. On this interpretation, the without-*shuo* remark should be understood as suggesting that sensory perception must be involved with conceptual elements. This conceptual involvement is a constitutional one: there cannot be any sensory perception without concept. It is not the two-step view, according to which we are first given the stimulation and then add interpretation onto the given.[9] The constitution of any perception involves both stimulation and concept. Without concept, our perception manifests only phenomena of passive distinguishing stimuli, which a thermometer or sunflower could possess. Further, sensory perception, on this view, could also be seen as a judgment, a reason bearer or a potential knowledge candidate.

This might sound Kantian. Both Chen and Mou have similar interpretations. However, the notion of *shuo* allows a deeper understanding of the conceptual involvement in sensory perception. Xunzi's conception of *shuo* suggests not only the idea that sensory perception must involve conceptual capacity, but also, and more directly, the idea that sensory perception must be based upon our capacity of judgment and justification. Xunzi's comments on sensory perception suggest the second idea explicitly, and the first idea must be understood in terms of the second one. There is something very novel here: the content of a concept must be identified in terms of judgments where the concept appears and the inferential relations consist of those judgments. One does not possess the concept unless one is capable of exercising those judgments and inferences. I think that the spontaneity of heart in Xunzi's comments that "reason, excuse, delight,

[8] Mou Zongsan and Wei Zhengtong have views similar to the two-stages view here (Mou 1953: 262; Wei 1974: 177).

[9] Chen shares this view (see Chen 1954: 40).

anger, grief, joy, dislike and like are differentiated by the heart" (22/108/18) and that "our hearts order, but take no orders" (21/104/11) is the spontaneity which issues in and is manifested through our exercises of judgment and justification.

It is worth noticing that the word *shuo* has been used frequently in the text of the *Xunzi* to form a binome *bianshuo* 辨說 (辯說). There are two words for *bian*: one is 辨, which has the word *xin* 心 (heart) as its part, the other is 辯, which has the word *yan* 言 (speech) as its part. The first literally means "to discriminate among things," and the second means "to argue" or "to dispute." These two terms are usually interchangeable in the text of the *Xunzi*. The play of the fusion of the two senses indicates the point advocated here: that the distinction among things must be made on the basis exhibited through exercises of argument, which is the paradigm of reason giving activities. As we shall argue later, *shuo* is a *social* justificatory activity. To see it as an intrinsic element of perceptual cognition, and, therefore, an intrinsic element of linguistic understanding, is to preclude the view that we can gain knowledge independently of social practice and that this sort of knowledge can serve as a kind of touchstone, standard, or foundation for our perceptual and linguistic knowledge. Thus, for Xunzi, for example, we could not be directly acquainted with certain types of sensory objects independently of how we see ourselves and how we treat each other, and that the alleged kind of direct acquaintance with such objects would not give us any knowledge of them.

We have derived from Xunzi's comments four conditions of the possibility of sensory perception: (1) the reception of stimulus through sensory organs; (2) the selection function of perception; (3) the reception of stimulus via proper sensory organ; and (4) the conceptual exercises manifested in judgment and inference. The second and the third conditions can be seen as merely causal conditions. But the rest are not only causal but also constitutional. Since, for Xunzi, difference and sameness among names is due to difference and sameness among sensory perceptions, we might say that the four conditions are also conditions for difference and sameness among names. In the same vein, we may say that the first and the last conditions have the status of being constitutional conditions of difference and sameness among names.

From Xunzi's analysis of sensory perception, and therefore the content of names, we learn that for him sensory stimulation and concept application are two constitutional elements of semantic content. The primary candidate for sensory stimulation in Xunzi's thought should be stimulation by external things through senses. We can thus reasonably infer that, for Xunzi, independent of external environment, a name cannot have any content, and therefore it makes no sense to say how various names differ in content. We may say that, in the most basic cases, one cannot understand the content of a name unless one has grasped the proper relation between the name and the external thing it is about. To see content as partly externally constituted precludes the Platonic view that content is something that exists independently of the empirical world. But, it is to be noticed that the view that content is partly externally constituted does not lead to the kind of naturalism that holds the view that meaning or content can ultimately be reduced to a causal relation between names and things in the external environment. Instead, as suggested in the notion of *shuo*, semantic constitution must involve something conceptual that comes out of judgment and inference, which belong to the domain of heart, i.e., the domain of spontaneity.

5 *Ming*, *Qi*, *Shuo,* and *Bian*: Linguistic Comprehension Process

The analysis of Xunzi's conception of sensory perception results in ascribing to him the idea that the content-constitution of a name involves both environmental elements, taken in from perception, and conceptual resources. The latter's primary and paradigmatic actualizations are exercises of them in judgment and justification. This is, I think, what motivated Xunzi to say that "We praise those arguments that are of justificatory coherence and empirical correspondence" (23/115/10). Since they might be equally fundamental, there is no need to determine which of the two elements is conceptually more primary than the other. And the text imputes no such a priority to either element, even if it has it that the first cannot have its semantic function unless the second partakes in its constitution. However, Xunzi's more semantically oriented texts indicate strongly that the semantics he would endorse is one that we might call *rational semantics*: the conceptual component and hence, and more distinctively, the rational exercise of judgment and justification play the primary role in the constitution of meaning, one that is more fundamental than the role of environmental elements via perception.

The text most relevant to our work here is Xunzi's discussions concerning the notions of *ming*, *qi*, *shuo,* and *bian*:

> If the content of a name is not understood, it should be taught via *ming*. If *ming* does not suffice the understanding, then one should enter *qi*. If *qi* fails to achieve the understanding, one should process *shuo*. If *shuo* also fails, one should come to *bian*. *Qi*, *ming, bian,* and *shuo*, being the primary explicit patterns for practical activities, are the first principles of the royal enterprise. (22/110/3-4)

It has been recognized that *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* are four phases leading to the semantic understanding of a name. Some have also recognized that in the process of semantic comprehension, the priority of the four phases should be ascending from *ming* to *bian*. I agree with these claims about semantic epistemology. Nonetheless, I shall argue that the epistemological priority ascending from *ming* to *bian* should be understood on the basis of the dependence relation from *ming* to *bian* at the level of semantic constitution. As Xunzi's remark "*Qi* and *ming* are functions of *bian* and *shuo*" (22/110/6-7) suggests, by *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*, Xunzi is aiming at explicating the constitutional elements of content, and his talk of linguistic understanding is parasitic on his ideas about meaning constitution.

An explication of Xunzi's remarks on meaning constitution shall lead directly to the main thesis of this essay, that is, for Xunzi, the constitutional element of the content of a name is the normative structure that governs the use of the name; and rectifying names are activities that make transparent the normative structure. Since Cua has the so-far most detailed explanation of *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* that occur in "Rectification of Names," I shall present my interpretation mainly in comparison with and contrast to his.

The primary tune of Cua's interpretation is that *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* are different phases of argumentation aiming at moral persuasion. The four phases are the following speech acts respectively: fixing reference, matching linguistic

understanding of the referential use of terms, explaining, and finally justifying. Cua sees *ming* as a kind of speech act aiming at disambiguating and clarifying meaning of terms, *qi* as a speech act oriented at agreement on linguistic understanding among speakers, and both *shuo* and *bian*, despite their subtle differences, as activities of justification (Cua 1985: 43-47, 177). Cua's study provides illuminating remarks on some important details, but his overarching frame of interpretation is misleading. *Ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* are not linguistic ways of persuasion. Otherwise the consecutive relations among the four kinds of speech acts with respect to linguistic understanding would be rendered unintelligible. *Ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* should be understood as four consecutive phases of manifesting constitutional elements of meaning.

5.1 *Ming*: Reference Fixing *Via* Ostensive Definition

Cua understands *ming* as "fixing the referent" of names, which is the activity of connecting names to their objects.[10] Among the object-connecting activities, the ones of prominent importance are those that suffice to differentiate objects for their corresponding names. Cua thinks that the remark "If the content of a name is not understood, it should be taught via *ming*" should be understood as "when the content [of a name] is not understood, one should connect the name to its objects." There is an illuminating point, which marks a crucial difference between *ming* and *qi*. We should discuss it in detail presently. For now it suffices to point out that *ming* is understood as a kind of activity connecting names with their objects which actually occur in observable surroundings. As we have pointed out in the section immediately above, Xunzi regards stimulation by the external environment as one of the constitutive elements of sensory perception, and thus of linguistic content. The discussion about sensory perception, and hence the content of names, gives obvious support to our interpretation of *ming*. And it is germane for Cua to say that *ming* activity might include ostensive definition.

The above conception of *ming* has a further, and perhaps more important, implication. As we have noted, Xunzi employed "name" to refer to names of various things including normative things like virtues. Thus the idea that there is no content to a name independent of the external environment gives us a deeper understanding of Xunzi's thought on norms. The environment-dependence of content suggests that linguistic content is at least partly determined by things in the external environment. And considering Xunzi's thought that difference and sameness of names are due to difference and sameness of sensory perceptions suggests that the external environment mentioned above should be seen as the environment within the reach of sensory experience. This further suggests that independently from the perceivable external environment, names, including normative ones, have no content. It strongly suggests that norms must be observable in human behavior.

Ming, however, has its limitations. Even if proper objects are shown to an agent, she might still be ignorant of the content of their names. It is so for many reasons. I

[10] Hansen's understanding of *ming* seems different. In Hansen's interpretative framework of classic Chinese philosophy, *ming* will be understood as a way of determining what a term includes and excludes (cf. Hansen 1989: 101). I do not think this supposed difference is genuine. One can grasp the reference of a term *iff* one can distinguish to what the term is applicable and to what it is not.

mention only two: the content of a name is something more than its reference, and more importantly, objects by themselves do not determine how they are classified, that is, objects by themselves do not determine what concepts we are going to employ to designate them. Ostensive definition, or something alike, works only when the learner already has some degree of conceptual capacity. This for Xunzi, as I have touched on and will argue extensively, cannot be the case unless one has the capacity for linguistic communication.

5.2 *Qi*: Matching Linguistic Definitions

Cua holds that *qi* is the expectation that both sides of ethical argumentation would reach agreement on linguistic understanding by communication. According to this conception, *qi* is a relation among people, not one between a speaker and a thing. It is a matching relation with respect to linguistic understanding of the referential use of terms (Cua 1985:48). This, in general, is a germane and important insight, but it can be explored further. Indeed *qi* is an act of communication aiming at linguistic understanding: it is a definition of a term given so that the speaker and her interlocutor would come to share their linguistic understanding of the term. But, since *qi* is the kind of activity one expects when *ming* (ostensive definition) fails its purpose, it should extend beyond ostensive definition. And that is why *qi* should be understood as a kind of *linguistic definition* practice, though there is no reason to expect *qi* to be offering an analytic or strict definition. If both sides of linguistic communication agree on the linguistic definitions given, then the semantic debate or inquiry ends.

Linguistic definitions show how a term in question should and should not be connected with other terms, that is, what sentences the term is allowed and not allowed to appear in. In this respect, *qi* is a kind of activity through which either party of linguistic communication manifests to the other the range of sentences in which the terms in semantic debate are allowed and not allowed to appear. When the ranges coincide, the goal of *qi* is reached.

5.3 *Shuo* and *Bian*: Rational Justification

Cua has provided a very complex explanation of *shuo* and *bian*. There is no need to go into all of it. What is important for us is the point that both *shuo* and *bian* are justificatory activities. As the appeal to concrete empirical evidence fails to render understanding of the meaning of a term, the speaker should proceed with his or her meaning explication by manifesting to his or her interlocutor the sentences that he or she takes to be the proper locus of the term. The meaning teaching ends if the speaker and the interlocutor concord. This is the stage of *qi*. If the verbal definitions endorsed by both sides of the communication fail to coincide, the content-manifestation activity needs to proceed to the next two stages: *shuo* and *bian*. *Shuo* is a kind of activity exercised more by the speaker than the interlocutor. It is the task of the speaker to manifest the inferential properties of the sentences that he thinks the terms to be defined could properly be embedded in. That is, *shuo* is the process of showing what could be implied by and what could imply the sentences properly containing the terms to be defined. The hope is to persuade, by the kind of

reasoning, the interlocutor to give up his own verbal definition and comply with the speaker's. The kind of inferential relation includes formal inferences and, more importantly, material inferences. Those sentences formed in the previous stage, i.e., *qi*, now function, for the speaker, as the premises or conclusions in those inferences or justification. They function as reasons, and the justification relations among them manifest what McDowell calls the space of reason.[11] It is the space of reason that endows names with their contents. I shall come to this point later.

There are two important distinctions between *shuo* and *qi*: First, even though both *shuo* and *qi* are sentence constructions, the activity of *qi* only manifests, in separation, various sentences where the speaker thinks the term in question could properly occur. But *shuo* aims at an articulation of proper inferences where those sentences play the roles of premise or conclusion. It takes no time for the inferential relations to further connect with sentences where the terms in debate do not even occur. Second, the activity of *qi* requires both the speaker's and the interlocutor's linguistic manifestations, but it takes only the speaker's own linguistic, inferential articulation to enact *shuo*, which aim at changing the interlocutor's attitude.

An important terminological point must be made here before we proceed any further. As we have pointed out, there are two interchangeable words for *bian*: 辨 and 辯. Eric Hutton remarks: "the text seems to play a fusion of these senses in the idea that true differences between things will be presented and defended through argument" (Hutton 2001: 281n). This however is an understatement of the fusion. The play of the fusion of the two senses is not merely meant to present or argue for a difference among things, but, more fundamentally, to show that distinguishing among things is based on the exercise of argument, the paradigm of reason giving activities. I will pursue this point further presently. For now it suffices to note that the two character 辨 and 辯) are interchangeable in the text of the *Xunzi*, especially when they are used with *shuo* to form the binome, *bian-shuo* (辨說 or 辯說) (see, for instances, 1/4/4, 6, 5/21/3, 8/33/17, 12/62/21, 18/88/21, 21/107/7, 22/110/3, 9, 11, 17, 28/138/19).

Bian is the dialectic activity of giving and asking for reasons. The main difference between *shuo* and *bian* lies in this: the former is an activity of giving reasons by the speaker; the latter is a linguistic interaction consisting of giving and asking for reasons. *Shuo* is the process through which a speaker manifests the proper inferences in which sentences containing the term in question play the role of premises or conclusions. In the process of *shuo* the propriety of an inference is determined from the speaker's point of view. And it is certainly true that what is proper from the speaker's point of view is not necessarily so. *Bian*, on the other hand, is the process of checking and answering to the other party's *shuo*. The checking or the rebuttal process renders no guarantee that either side would persuade the other, but, in practice, it normally leads both sides of the debate to re-evaluate some of the inferences they previously deemed correct.

The spade of semantic explication stops at *bian*. There is no other ground than the social, dialectic justificatory activity of *bian* itself to decide whether it would suffice

[11] The term "space of reason" is from Sellars' remark: "In characterizing an episode or a state as that [better: one] of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1956: 298-299).

to manifest the right content of a term. The epistemic quest of objective correctness becomes less urgent and sensible if one recognizes that it is the same type of justificatory activity that institutes the very content of a term. Or, we may say that if it is the content of a term, i.e., the norm that embedded in the term, that governs our uses of it and therefore our semantic evaluation of it, such evaluation can thus be seen as the process of self-manifestation of the content of the term. Though it is of no doubt that we sometimes run wild in the semantic evaluation, but assuming human nature is formed and shaped by rationality, the self-manifestation process will progress to its end in the long run. Thus, in practice, since we must start our semantic evaluation somewhere and there is no other place to start than the social dialectic justificatory activity of *bian*, it is clear that we must simply take whatever criteria of evaluation we happen to have and subject them to the internal justificatory test. The test is internal in two senses. The first is the self-government by self-manifestation. The second is that whether these justificatory activities are satisfactory was determined within their own standards of satisfaction.

5.4 Representationalism and Inferentialism

Cua understands *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* as four different phases of argumentative discourse which depicts "an order of increasing degree of complexity with the more complex phrase comprehending the less complex as a component. In this light, explanation (*shuo*) is more complex than *qi* as *qi* is more complex than *ming*, just as justification (*bian*) embraces explanation (*shuo*) as an element. Of course, the procedure of increasing complexity is not a logically necessary one" (Cua 1985: 57). This *composite* interpretation of the relation between *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*, however, does not explain clearly how a later phase may support the whole process when the previous one(s) fails. It says nothing more than that when a previous one fails, do something more complex.

Hansen infamously proposes that

> The natural position for a Chinese philosopher of language is that characters are *words* and *words* are syntactically mobile. We string words together. What do we form? We form compound words and phrases…. What happens when we combine these into bigger clusters of language?…. Ancient Chinese language theorists listed *shuo* "explanation" as the next level. The top of the language structural pyramid…was *dao* "prescriptive discourse." (Hansen 1989: 82-83)

On Hansen's view, what we call sentences, arguments, and theories are all compound words and phrases (in Hansen's sense) for Chinese language theorists. There is no need to go further into the Hansenean sense here. It suffices for our end to point out that for Hansen *shuo* and *bian* are just compound words (names, in our terminology). In Hansen's view, the epistemic consecutive relation among *ming-qi-shuo-bian* would be explained as something like this: If a word in a simpler form cannot be understood, then proceed to other words in a more complex form. How plausible this interpretation is depends on the plausibility of Hansen's explanation of the semantic transition, merging, and relation between words with various degrees of complexity. But the hope of receiving a plausible explanation from Hansen becomes

only dimmer when we consider his mass noun hypothesis, according to which, all Chinese nouns are mass nouns and each of them refers to one scope of things. Different names thus refer to different scopes of things. The primary semantic function of terms is distinction, or, in pragmatic terms, making distinctions. Learning names is primarily learning how to make distinctions (see Hansen 1989: 84-86). But, we may wonder, if one cannot make a simple distinction, how can one understand a more complex one? It is clear that a semantic explanation in pragmatic terms is needed beyond mere making distinctions. But since the practice of making distinctions is taken to be the primary semantic function of language, we should not expect a more primary semantic exploration, in pragmatic terms or otherwise, from Hansen. Hansen is, though, right about the general point that classic Chinese semantics should be understood as pragmatic semantics. Language should be understood as guiding discourse. But his particular conception of Chinese language denies him a promising pragmatic analysis of semantics.

On what general conception of meaning can one make sense of *the consecutive content-illuminating process* that Xunzi suggests in *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*? What Xunzi says is that if you wish to teach somebody what a name means you have to first employ *ming*, and if it fails, *qi*, then *shuo*, and lastly, *bian*. The nature of the consecutive relation among *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* is crucial for our discussion. A germane interpretation should render the consecutive relation comprehensible. But, on some philosophical conception of meaning, one will not only fail to make sense of the consecutive relation, but also render the very aim of the meaning-manifestation process unachievable. There are two major semantic frameworks available in the field based on which one might try to understand the relation among *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*. The first might be labeled as *semantic representationism*, the second, *semantic inferentialism*.

Semantic representationism imputes explanatory and conceptual priority to the notion of representation. The basic doctrine of representationism is that semantic properties in general are ultimately determined by the representational relation between names and their object(s). According to representationism, determining the representational relation between a term and its objects determines its content. *Ming*, on a representationist interpretation, is thus understood as a way of determining the representation relation. The view further holds that the content of a name is the basis, or at least an irreducible part of the basis of the content of judgment. This is what the activity of *qi* constructs. Further, since both *shuo* (explanation) and *bian* (dialectical justification) are behavioral patterns of connecting judgments, the content carried with these activities ultimately rests, at least partially, on those that are attached to names via *ming*. It follows that, on the representationist view, if the content of a name is indeterminate, so are those of the judgments, and anything beyond, that contain it. The indeterminacy will then go all the way up to *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*.

The representationist conception of meaning thus renders *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* incapable of accomplishing their apparent goal, that is, the semantic manifestation of names. As we have said, the four stages of instituting names at least appear to aim at enabling people ignorant of the content of a name to come to a recognition of the content. This presupposes that people to be taught have not yet apprehended the content of the name. Now if the semantic properties of *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* ultimately

rested on, or consisted in a non-assimilating way, of *ming*, no sense could have been made of the idea that as *ming* fails meaning teaching, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* could help. In the same vein, representationism renders the consecutive relation among *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian* incomprehensible.

Semantic inferentialism, on the other hand, explains the semantic apprehension process primarily in terms of inference. It is my main intention to argue that Xunzi's thoughts on semantics, including that on *ming*, *qi*, *shuo*, and *bian*, embody an inferentialist spirit, or, at least, that an inferentialist semantics would render Xunzi's remarks about semantics most intelligible. The representative of semantic inferentialism is Robert Brandom, and thus I shall introduce inferentialism by means of some of the overarching ideas in his *Making It Explicit*. According to semantic inferentialism, the content of a name is not determined by its representative function, but by the propositional contents of the sentences where it could occur; and the propositional content of a sentence, in turn, is determined by its inferential properties, the inferential relations it has with other sentences.[12] In a word, the inferential properties of the sentences where a name resides determine the content of the name. Inferentialism imputes semantic priority to the notion of inference, rather than that of representation or truth. As for semantic epistemology, inferentialism would endorse the view that to understand the content of a name is to grasp the range of sentences wherein the name could occur and those in which it couldn't. To understand the propositional content of a sentence, in turn, is to grasp its inferential role. To grasp the inferential role of a sentence is to understand what sentences or actions we are committed to when we acknowledge the sentence, and also what conditions would or would not entitle us to use the sentence. In other words, since the propositional content of a sentence is constituted by the justificatory role of the sentence, one cannot comprehend the propositional content of a sentence independent of the justificatory context.

According to semantic inferentialism, the activity of justification—the activity of giving reasons and asking for them—constitutes the basis for all linguistic activity, since semantic content in general is endowed with justificatory (inferential) activities. Justification makes language, and thought, possible. Accordingly, as we intend to explicate the content of a term, what we should do eventually is to clearly state the justificatory (inferential) properties of those sentences where the term can properly occur. That is, the task of semantic explication of a term is to articulate the justificatory and inferential function of the sentences embedding it.

According to semantic inferentialism, to make a claim is to enter and commit to an inferential space, that is, to commit to whatever has the claim as premise. Meanwhile, we also undertake the following responsibility: to fulfill the pre-demands and pre-conditions that entitle one to make the claim, and to exclude those that would undermine the entitlement. This general principle applies to any linguistic activity. Thus in linguistic communication, to claim a proposition is to commit to an inferential space; it is to permit interlocutors the following: (1) to require the speaker

[12] It would take a very long story to explain how the content of a term could be articulated from the inferential properties of the relevant sentences. Those interested in the details might refer to Brandom's *Making It Explicit*.

to fulfill the conditions of eligibility of making the claim, and to preclude whatever would undermine the eligibility; (2) to make the same claim under the same rationale and conditions; (3) to attribute to the speaker whatever could be inferred from the claim. That is, when we speak or reason in various ways, we are inevitably entering a social space where we assume various roles, demand a certain type of treatment in accordance with our self-perception, recognize others as having the right to make certain kinds of moves within our speech-community, and give rationale to others to explain or to justify what we are doing.

Now let us come back to Xunzi. It is of little doubt that the consecutive process of semantic manifestation with ascending priority from *ming*, *qi*, *shuo* to *bian* can be made transparent under inferentialism. According to inferentialism, when the content of a term is at issue, we have to get into all kinds of social activities that would manifest the inferential properties of those sentences where the term could properly occur. The reason why those social inferential practices suffice to manifest the right content of the term is that it is the very same pattern of social, inferential practices that determine and institute the content of the name. In fact, the very content of the term is the normative, social, inferential practice involved with and in relation to the term. This is the rationale, I argue, that makes Xunzi attribute semantic-manifestation priority to *bian* over *shuo*, *shuo* over *qi*, and *qi* over *ming*.

The semantic inferentialism just sketched out has normative notions such as correctness, incorrectness, obligation, permission, commitment, and entitlement, as the fundamental notions in semantics. The normative dimension in semantic infererntialism is embedded in our normative practices, so it is also a kind of normative pragmatics. As we are going to demonstrate, Xunzi's view on norms can be reasonably conceived as a kind of normative pragmatics. According to normative pragmatics, the concept of meaning should be explicated in terms of normative practice, because it requires normative practice for its institution and explication. In other words, semantic concepts have to be explicated in terms of normative structure embodied and embedded implicitly in social practices. Further, to understand normative concepts, we can appeal to no concepts other than normative ones; it is normativity all the way down (cf. Brandom 1994: 44).

To sum up, to make the content of a proposition explicit is to articulate the inferential properties of the proposition. To properly articulate the inferential function is to grasp the norm that governs it. This semantic idea can explain in a consistent and reasonable manner why Xunzi attributes semantic-manifestation priority to *bian* over *shuo*, *shuo* over *qi*, and *qi* over *ming* (see 22/110/3-4).

6 *Bianshuo* and *Daoli*: Representation of the Normative Network

Dao and *li* are among the fundamental notions in classic Chinese philosophy. What they mean, however, vary among schools, and even among scholars within a school. In this short section, I argue, albeit only briefly, that for Xunzi *dao* and *li* are the space of reason that is both instituted and manifested by the very same kind of activities that constitute name-rectification. The latter primarily consists in the social-justificatory activities of *bian* and *shuo*. Since it is the space of reason that

imputes words with meaning, what I argue implies that *dao* and *li* are the constitutional ground for meaning.

Only in the chapter of "Discourse on Heaven" does Xunzi employ "*dao*" to refer to regularities found in natural phenomena, which are void of any sense of normativity. Textual evidences elsewhere overwhelmingly indicate that *dao* for Xunzi possesses the following characteristics: (1) *Dao* is the totality of standards of justification that people *ought to* accept. This idea appears at many passages, such as "Thus, the gentleman is with *dao* and by way of it to further arrange and test things. If he is at one with *dao*, then he will be a just man; and if he uses it to regulate things, then things will be put in proper orders and be properly discerned" (21/105/2, see also, for instances, 15/72/11-2, 21/103/16-18); "Thus, when they affirm *dao* and follow it, how could it be harmful to have increased their desires? And when they do not approve of *dao* but forsake it, how could deceasing them produce order? Therefore, the wise judgement should be based on *dao* and nothing else" (22/112/2). (2) *Dao* concerns both human affairs, past or to come, and our cognition of things. It does not concern natural things, whether up in the sky or down on earth: "What is *dao*? It is not the route of the heaven, nor the route of the earth. It is what people take to be the right course, and what the gentlemen deem as the proper route" (8/28/15-16). (3) *Dao* is man-made, instituted by human practice in social, cultural, and historical contexts. And it can be embodied through proper cultural or legal ways of transformation. Xunzi thinks that if we indulge human natural inclinations, moral vice and social anarchy are certain to develop. For this reason, people institute standards to "tame and transform their inborn nature," to guide his inborn nature "with the *dao* of the ritual principle and righteousness" (23/113/1-7). (4) *Dao* refers to various rationales that various people *in fact* choose to guide their actions, or, putting it more metaphorically, *dao* refers to various tracks that different people in fact choose to follow: "Human beings are with the same [basic] desires, but they achieve them via different *dao*" (4/12/17-8, see also 10/42/12, 8/28/15-16).

The character of *dao* outlined in (1) and that in (4) are of subtle differences. Though they are all about rationale or standard, the former refers to those that one ought to endorse, the latter, to those that one in fact endorses. The ambiguity of *dao* in senses (1) and (4) brings with it some significant implications of Xunzi's thought. We should come back to it later. In general, for Xunzi, *dao* is neither about regularities selected out of natural phenomena, nor about Platonic entities or rules transcending the empirical world, not even fundamental causal sources of cosmos. Rather, it refers to the totality of holistic structure of norms, which governs our feelings, behaviors, and cognitions, that are in turn instituted by human practices, linguistic or non-linguistic, in social, cultural, and historical contexts. *Dao* for Xunzi is never cut off from the concrete world, neither is it ever watered down to non-normative.

Though *li* differs in significant points from *dao*, they share some aspects that are important for the point at hand. Cua has identified two senses of "*li*" from the text of the *Xunzi*. One is a descriptive sense of *li*, which refers to patterns in general, such as those that one can find in skin (4/15/9, 21/105/6, 23/114/12), in jade (30/144/7), or in a stream flowing within its course (28/140/6). The other is a normative sense, in which *li*, as a noun, refers to patterns of speech, culture, or activity in general, and,

as a verb (see 2/8/12, 7/25/19, 9/40/14, 10/48/10, 11/50/7, 11/55/25, 19/92/12-3, 19/92/21-2, 23/114/17, 23/115/1-3, 26/125/4, 26/125/10, 15/70/11), to something like "putting to order" (see 17/82/17, 9/38/10, 9/39/3, 12/58/6, 25/123/2, 27/130/24, 31/146/8). Stalnaker accepts this interpretation: "Xunzi uses *li* in two basic senses: 'pattern' and 'order.' All of his uses of the term can and should be understood as literal examples or analogical extensions of these root ideas"; "Its most common meaning in the *Xunzi* is the distinctive pattern or order present in something, often in the sense of an underlying pattern or basic structure" (Stalnaker 2004: 57). Being concerned with epistemological issues, Cua also sees *li* as reason or rationale rather than a principle, as it is normally used as a practice-transcendent notion (Cua 1985: 20-22). This extended interpretation is controversial. I agree with Stalnaker that Xunzi does not use *li* to refer to rationale or reason, which instead should be referred to by *gu* and *shuo* (Stalnaker 2004: 57). But still, I would argue presently that *li* is intrinsically connected to reason or rationale in the sense that *li* is the normative or justificatory pattern instituted by and manifested through reason giving practices.

As Stalnaker points out, "Xunzi's other main sense of the term is 'order.' He uses *li* as a verb seven times, and in six of these it means 'to order,' in the sense of arranging things in an order…. He uses *li* descriptively 18 times in the sense of 'well-ordered,' which he applies to persons, and to various natural and social phenomena. Seven times he uses *li* abstractly as 'good order' in general." "Xunzi also several times uses *li* as part of a binome, *wenli* 文理, which depending on context means 'proper form and order' or 'form and pattern'" (Stalnaker 2004: 57). The key question for us here is what kind of order *li* is or puts to things. It is certainly not a natural order for Xunzi. It is clear that the order should be a normative one governing human speech, behavior, feeling, and cognition (see, for instance, 8/29/2, 9/39/5, 21/105/7-18, 21/106/18-20, 23/116/7, 23/114/1-6, 14-18). But what is the nature of a normative order? In what kind of thread should one put things in a normative order?

I propose that for Xunzi, *li* is inconceivable independent of reason-giving practices. The totality of *li* is called *dali* 大理 (21/102/5), "the Great pattern," by Xunzi. *Dali* is the normative network instituted by and underpinning the justificatory relations of normative behaviors. In short, *dali* is the space of reason. Reasons and rationales are nodes in justificatory relations of rational activities. I want to claim that the totality of justificatory practices in a given time is the culture pattern, *li*, of that time. Since the space of reason is constituted by normative practices, it is not a Platonic sort of entity. On the other hand, since the constitution of the space of reason involves normative behavior, it is reasonable to say that it is not something reducible to naturalistic jargon, despite the fact that it is instituted by human behavior.[13]

Again, my proposal is that *dao* and *li* both should be conceived as the space of reason, i.e., the totality of reasons and the justificatory relations among them. It is to be noticed that justificatory activities include linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. That is, *dao* and *li* are constituted by the totality of justificatory relations among the relevant practices in the social context. *Dao* or *li* should better be understood as denoting not a metaphysical entity but a fundamental normative relation among persons that makes possible, prescribes, and mediates their self-conscious,

[13] "The man-made (way of transforming human inborn nature) is the supreme achievement of culture pattern" (19/95/1). See also 22/111/9-10.

consciousness of others and awareness of the world. To be more specific, *dao* or *li* is the way in which people reflect on what they have come to take as authoritative and responsible for themselves and others. It is the normative form in which we affirm and reassure ourselves that our reason-giving practices are not terribly flawed, that our self-identity in reflection and in practice is not deeply faulty and irrational, and that the world is fundamentally as we take it to be.

I have made quite a few comments and extensive claims on Xunzi's conceptions of *dao* and *li*. Hereafter I am going to give further support to them by investigating Xunzi's thought on the relation between *shuo*, *dao-li* and the *cognition* of *dao* and *li*. Xunzi relates *shuo* and *dao* as follows:

> *Bian* and *shuo*, by not allowing things to be differentiated from their names, are used to illustrate *dao* of action and repose. *Qi* and *ming* are functions of *bian* and *shuo. Bian* and *shuo* are the mind's representations of *dao*. The heart is the artisan and minister of *dao*….. When the heart accords with *dao*, when *shuo* accords with the heart, when sentences accord with *shuo*, then one may rectify names and define [them], and [their] contents will be clearly expressed. Distinguish the different without going astray, and extend classes without committing incoherence. Then what you heard of will be in accord with proper form, and when you make distinction through arguments, you will exhaust reasons. (22/110/7-9)

This remark implies that *dao-li* is subject to the representation of *shuo*: it can be adequately articulated in *shuo*. Xunzi has even explicitly made comments like "his advocation definitely matches *li*" (8/29/2). For *shuo* to represent or match *dao-li*, the underlying structure of the two must be identical. This is not to say that they should have identical structures, but that they must be constructed in a way that makes structural mapping between them possible. Now since the primary structure of *shuo* consists of justificatory relations among reasons, we have a good reason to hold that *dao-li* shares with *shuo* its basic justificatory relations. Again, the detailed structure of a particular *shuo* might not match up squarely with the structure of *dao* and *li*, since *shuo* might not conform to *dao-li*.

Even Stalnaker, who has firmly denied that *li* has been used in the *Xunzi* as reason or rationale, admits that there is some textual evidence for the idea that *li* and reason giving activities like *shuo* and *yan* 言 (advocation) are closely connected: "The closest parallel is in Xunzi's six applications of *li* to the term *yan*, meaning 'speech,' and sometimes 'ideas' or 'theory.' Five of these six uses are in an ironic formula used to end a series of criticisms of competing thinkers: what they advocate has reasons (*gu*), what they say completes a pattern, sufficient to deceive and confuse the ignorant crowd" (Stalnaker 2004: 58).[14] Xunzi rebuts his competing thinkers on the account that they have too narrow a view on *li*. But he does not deny them of a portion of *li*. It is very interesting to note in the text cited here that Xunzi parallels speech having reason with pattern, that is, *li*. This at least gives strong support to the idea that *li* shares with *shuo* its basic justificatory structure, if not yet to the idea that *li* is instituted via justificatory speech

[14] The citations are from 6/21/13, 17, 20; 6/22/2, 5. Here Stalnaker takes *gu* as reasons. But, as I have pointed out, passages 22/108/18-22/109/1 suggest that although both *gu* and *shuo* are to be understood as reasons, they are opposite to each other. *Gu*, in contrast to *shuo,* is apparent reasons or mere excuses.

acts: "Those who understand *shuo* know that one should do whatever would benefit the rational pattern and avoid whatever will not benefit the rational pattern. This is what it means by 'fitting *shuo* 中說'" (8/29/4-5).

It must be admitted that even though the sharing of the same structure allows *shuo* to have the function of revealing *dao* and *li*, our argument does not demonstrate conclusively that *dao-li* are instituted by *shuo*. But it gives strong support to the idea that *dao* and *li* share with *shuo* the same primary structure which is a justificatory scheme.

Now let us turn to the cognition of *dao-li*. Xunzi has emphasized frequently the importance of the *expansion* of our view on *dao* and *li* and the *exclusion* of a one-sided, narrow-minded view on *dao* and *li* (see, for instances, 17/83/3, 21/102/5, 21/103/12). It is interesting to see that what is being emphasized in these remarks on epistemic cautiousness is not to avoid *incorrect* belief or *false* judgment, but to avoid *partiality* of cognition. The anti-parochialism spirit in fact orients Xunzi's major criticisms of other philosophers. He always says of his opponents that they are not devoid of good reasons for their doctrines, but that they are guilty of parochialism.[15] When one is short of having *dao* as a whole in view, knowledge fades and evades. The narrower one has *dao* in view, the weaker one's epistemic status on anything becomes. The epistemic task that Xunzi poses to us is never something couched in terms of truth, correspondence, intuition, and reference, which play the primary roles in representationist semantics and epistemology. The way of precluding parochialism is to exhibit, as comprehensively as possible, one's cognition of the space of reason through the practices of *bian* and *shuo*. The way of showing one's view of the space of reason is to show the rationale of every proposition one endorses.

In the anti-parochialist remarks, Xunzi pairs parochialism with intellectual dimness, and *panoramaism* with intellectual lucidity. It indicates that the space of reason, i.e., *dao*, is not only something to be known of, but, more importantly, determines the degree of clarity of our cognition. The more panoramic our view of the space of reason is, the more lucid our cognition becomes, and the more limited space we have in view is, the foggier and dimmer our cognition becomes. If it turns out to be too confining of a view on *dao*, cognition becomes impossible.

What can we learn about the nature of *dao* from Xunzi's anti-parochialism on the cognition of *dao*? First, *dao* is better conceived as something you know more or know less, and it would be misleading to picture it as something you either know or fail to know. This is of no surprise. Since *dao* is the totality of norms or something holistically constituted,[16] most, if not all, of us can only be justified in claiming partial knowledge of it (see, e.g., 21/106/18-20). Second, it really does not make sense to say that one can "know" pieces of *dao* without a grasp of the whole of it. *Dao* is holistically constituted, so one cannot have a complete knowledge of part of it unless one has it completely in view. Third, if the content of a word is a norm and *dao* is the totality of norms, then it follows from the second point that one does not

[15] See, for instances, 6/22/2, 5; 21/106/18-20; 21/103/25-21/104/7. Stalnaker has observed this aspect of Xunzi's thought too (see Stalnaker 2004: 61).

[16] See, for instance, "Everything is a portion of *dao*…. The fool takes a single thing to be the whole of *dao* and thinks he has comprehended *dao*. He is [in fact] ignorant" (17/83/3).

have a comprehensive understanding of the content unless one has a comprehensive grasp of *dao*. This further implies that contents of various words do not exist in isolation. They cannot be understood individually, independently from the holistic context formed by their relations.

In short, this picture of the cognition of *dao* does not support that *dao* is constituted by individual things existing independently from one another. But it gives support to the idea that *dao* is holistically instituted and that when we know it more we know how to act more properly in the social context and respond more adequately to things in the external environment. In the rest of this section, I shall make, in connection with the reading of Xunzi's account of *dao* and *li* discussed above, some remarks on his characterizations of the sages, gentlemen, and laymen. This will deepen our discussion and expel some misunderstandings.

In my reading of Xunzi, I attributed to him the idea that *dao* is man-made, instituted by human practice in a social, cultural, and historical context. The social practices are not limited to those exercised by some particular people, such as the sages, but to the everyday practices of common people, the way we live by. This is an uncommon reading. Hansen, for instance, holds that "One way, one *dao*, of rectifying names and using them in guiding social conduct most effectively guarantees human success—the traditional one. Argument by authority (brilliant, insightful sage kings invented it) and its long history and successful practice show this" (Hansen 1987: 327). Typically, commentators grant the sages (or the sage-kings) the privileged status of inventing *dao*. But I do not think the sages or the sage kings have such an institutional status. The sages have the privileged status of knowing *dao* and manifesting it in practice and in language, but not inventing it. This is hinted at in the following text: "The sages are the channels to *dao*, they are the channels to *dao* for the whole world" (8/13/5). I will argue for this reading in the next section. In the rest of this section, I only characterize my point further.

Xunzi ascribes the sages with the privileged status of becoming internally completely cognitively lucid with *dao*. I want to claim that the privileged status is an epistemological one, not a status of construction or creation. When Xunzi says that "*li* 禮 (riturals), *yi* 義 (righteousness), laws and standards are instituted by the sages" (23/114/15, also cf. 23/113/17), I do not think he holds the view that social norms are what the sages institute, either by some rules independent from social practice or by appealing to moral feelings or intuitions. What Xunzi is trying to characterize is that the sages have the special capacity of fully recognizing and properly articulating in practice the space of reason as it is instituted in daily human normative practices. The sages have the privileged status of knowing and articulating, not inventing or creating.[17]

Gentlemen are those who endeavor to make themselves a sage. Thus gentlemen devote themselves to the cognition and explication of *dao* and *li*. And the only viable way to achieve this goal is through *bian* and *shuo*. As we have said, *dao* and *li* are the full range of the space of reason, the space consisting of the

[17] It is an important issue whether sage kings and enlightened kings only have privileged epistemological status but not the privileged status of construction or creation of the space of reason, or *Dao*. I hope to bring out here that, in the *Xunzi*, rituals, norms, laws, and any other things with explicit normative forms are indeed instituted by sage kings and the like. But we find no textual supports to the idea that *Dao*, as the ultimate sources and standards of those explicit normative forms, is instituted by sage kings and the like.

justificatory relations among reasons. *Shuo* is the way one exhibits, as far as one is able, the range of the rationale one has committed to in the space of reason; *bian* is a dialectical articulation of the space of reason between two sides of the debate. Criticism and rebuttal are inevitable in the process of *bian*, and it is likely to bring with it the effects: modification of bias, abandonment of dogmas, and, most importantly, expansion of one's vision of the space of reason. If we ignore the possibility of radical error, we may reasonably say that for Xunzi, our knowledge of the space of reason can expand through the process of *bian* and *shuo*.

Sage, gentlemen, and layman are ranked in terms of the degree of awareness of the space of reason. We all live in the space of reason, the context of normative practices, and are constrained by it. The sages are those who have the whole range of the space of reason in view, gentlemen are those who endeavor to become a sage, and laymen are those endowed with a limited and dim rational horizon. The way that gentlemen expand their rational horizon is through constantly examining and criticizing the inferential relations among thoughts and actions and contextual elements in linguistic and non-linguistic forms. Rectification of names is a process of becoming conscious of norms and apparent paradoxes, incoherencies, and conflicts within one's own consciousness and other's. *Bian* and *shuo* are not only a matter of linguistic diagnosis or therapy, but also the way to sageness and virtue. Rectifying names is the way of manifesting the space of reason and therefore also the way of becoming a sage and virtuous.

7 Meaning Institution *Via* Agreement in Custom

In this section, I explore Xunzi's remark that semantic content is instituted through agreement in custom. The survey will further support the thesis of this essay, i.e., for Xunzi, it is the social, justificatory practices in the cultural and historical context that constitute linguistic meaning. The question of what institutes linguistic meaning is answered by an inquiry into the origin of meaning:

> In instituting names, the later kings followed the practices of the *Yin* in the legal names, followed *Zhou* practices in names pertaining to ranks and titles, and also followed their rituals in names for cultural forms…. In the case of miscellaneous names applied to all the various things of creation, they followed the set customs of various regions afar. (22/107/21-22)

Names have no predetermined appropriateness. One forms agreement in order to name things. Once the agreement is abided by and has become custom, then it may be called "appropriate," and that different from the agreement in custom is called "inappropriate." Names have no predetermined content. Names are instituted with contents by people's agreement, and if the agreement is abided by and has become custom, then they may be said to be contentful names (22/109/10-11).

Mou quite correctly points out that contents of names are behavioral patterns formed in practices (Mou 1953: 254). As we have argued in length, the *li* 禮 (ritual) of *Yin* and *Zhou* Dynasties represents patterns of normative behavior. Thus, the behavioral patterns that stand for contents of names should be constrained within the scope of

patterns of normative behavior. Without this qualification, whether the characterization of behavioral patterns must involve normative terms will become questionable. But, as it was pointed out in the first section of this essay, the concerns of terms such as legal terms, ceremonial terms, and terms of rank and title are normative in nature and so have to be cashed out in normative terms like "ought," "permission," "obligation," "prohibition," "correct" or "incorrect." And this is true even for "miscellaneous names." To repeat, what a name designates is patterns of normative behavior, that is, it states the conditions under which some behaviors are mandated, some prohibited and some permitted. It also lays out the responsibilities that have to be undertaken when some behaviors are carried out.

As for the "constitution through agreement in custom," Cua takes it to express the idea that in a naming practice one is required to "respect the existent linguistic habits." Cua's interpretation underestimates the importance of the remark though. The remark does not concern standards of naming activity, but necessary conditions for names to have the contents they have. The remark should not be understood as saying that one shall not use a term differently from how it is used conventionally. Rather, it is a comment about how names can have their contents; it is about the problem of content-constitution of names. The remark that "if it is constituted through agreement in custom, then it is adequate" concerns the propriety of meaning institution. A very similar remark reveals directly the meaning-constitution dimension of agreement-in-custom: "When it is constituted through agreement in custom, it becomes a contentful name." The agreement-in-custom remark concerns the content-constitution of a name. These two remarks together suggest that for Xunzi, there are intimate relations between the notion of the propriety of name-constitution and the notion of content-constitution of names; both are the result of "agreement in custom."

But what does the notion of "agreement in custom" mean? First of all, it obviously states that content-constitution and propriety of name-using requires agreement among people. But Xunzi remarkably proceeds further to say that embodiment of agreement in custom is required for the completion of the content-constitution and use-propriety setting processes. That is, it takes constant social practices to embody and embed the agreement. The requirement of social, pragmatic embodiment and embedment can be seen as a qualification of the agreement required. It is to qualify the agreement as agreement in practice, but not merely agreement in opinion, to borrow a term from Wittgenstein. Another reason why I choose the phase "agreement in custom" instead of "agreement and custom" is to avoid the impression that mere agreement in opinion suffices for content.

There is no real agreement in practice if a violation of the agreement is not denied or does not carry with it the liability of punishment, or a compliance with the agreement is not rewarded. There is no real custom if there are no normative practices to carry out sanctions on deviant behavior and rewards on obedience. We might even say that customs are patterns of normative behavior. The explication of them will contain on the one hand conditions under which some behaviors have to be done, some are prohibited, and some are permitted; on the other hand, responsibilities that have to be undertaken when some behaviors are carried out.

The need for punishment and reward to institute norms is, I think, the reason Xunzi occasionally says that it is the sage kings who "institute" names, the norms

that guide us. It takes punishment and reward to institute norms in practice. But, whether norms can be explicitly instituted, i.e., institutionalized in a society, relies on much more contingencies among which the effective exercise of punishment and reward is the most important one. In a society where moral standards are constantly subject to debate or doubt, enormous power is required to settle moral debates and doubts—it takes something like a king's power to carry out effective sanctions and rewards to institute explicit norms or laws. But it takes sages to recognize the proper ways of instituting proper norms. The sages as such, with words but no swords, of course do not have the needed power to embody norms in a society, to form a system, an institution. Thus, it takes a sage and a king, or, better, a sage king, to explicitly institute norms. The recognition of the necessity of a sage king for the institution of norms is therefore the recognition of the necessity of the power of sanction and the correct cognition of norms in the institution of norms. The sages have the privileged status of full recognition of norms, and the kings the necessary power to formally implement them. But neither has the privileged status of creating or inventing norms.[18] The norms are always there with us, though only implicitly in our everyday practices.

Norms are instituted by agreement-in-custom and so they are subject to change. They change when agreement-in-custom changes. They change because human practices are embedded in social, historical, and environmental contexts, which are full of contingent factors. This is a change due to our everyday practice, not a change in our opinions, or anyone's opinion, including a king's opinion, whatever reason and motivation he might have. I am not saying that Xunzi has explicitly endorsed that norms or *dao* are subject to change. He, unfortunately, says that *dao* applies timelessly.[19] But since he also allows the possibility of the later kings to "institute" explicit norms that differ from those of the former kings, he would allow the possibility of change in norms. In any case, his view on the constitution of norms, constitution via agreement-in-custom, has the implication that norms may change in accord to changes in our practice. Norms are subject to change, but old norms or conventions will be respected as long as they are in coordination with our practices. Also, there is no reason to say that norms change constantly, and it is probably true that some are more perpetual than others.

I suggest that the content-determination practices of agreement-in-custom have the same forms as the practices of *bian* and *shuo*, i.e., the inferential justificatory practices. And whether *bian* and *shuo* is properly executed is determined by whether they have in accordance with the social, normative practices, i.e., agreement-in-practice. That is, propriety of *bian* and *shuo* is determined by the social, normative practices that govern the inferential relations among various actions.

[18] Xunzi has said that if enlightened lord (*mingjun* 明君) presides, there is no need for *bian* and *shuo*, and that *bian* and *shuo* are only necessary now because the nobleman doesn't have other means to put things in order (see 22/110/1-3). One might feel my reading must accommodate the remark. My proposal would be that the enlightened lord put things in order not by mere force and law, but by force and law in accordance with *Dao*, which now is thoroughly manifested by *bian* and *shuo*.

[19] Passages found in 6/22/8-6/23/2, 9/39/5 and 21/102/5-6 suggest this line of thought.

The reason why the activities of *bian* and *shuo* suffice to manifest *dao* and *li* is this: *bian* and *shuo* are justificatory activities which exhibit the justificatory relations among judgments, i.e., *dao* and *li*; by the same token, the very practices of *bian* and *shuo* are governed by *dao* and *li*. On the one hand, *bian* and *shuo* make explicit the norms implicit in the practices in social context; on the other hand, as normative practices, *bian* and *shuo* are governed by norms implicit in social practices. I believe this governing-manifesting relation between *dao-li* and *bian-shuo* is implied by Xunzi's remark that "*Bian* and *shuo* are the mind's representations of *dao*. The heart is the artisan and minister of *dao*.… When the heart accords with *dao*, when *shuo* accords with the heart, when sentences accord with *shuo*, then one may rectify names and define [them], and [their] contents will be clearly expressed.… [W]hen you make distinction through arguments you will exhaust reasons" (22/110/7-9; see also 22/107/21-2; 22/109/10-1).

Hansen's view seems similar to mine, but it is not. He says: "The essential function of language is to guide behaviour. Bodies of language do so constitute a *dao* 'way.' Humans internalize the guiding discourse and the heart-mind implements the internalized code in guiding our action in the world" (Hansen 1989: 85). This is almost a good point, but it is misleading in a serious way. Language is not something human intend to "internalize." Language makes what we are and it is inside and around of us all the time.[20] Language, at the same time, is something that we appeal to in order to make explicit what we are, what we ought to be, and how we ought to act. It is not something out there to be internalized, but something implicitly in our heart and practices. What we can do about it is to make its nature, and therefore our nature, explicit through the linguistic practices of *bian* and *shuo*.

8 Conclusion

For Xunzi, to rectify a name is to restore the right content of the name. Semantic contents are norms, which are not entities of any sort but patterns of normative social behavior. Further, name-rectification is meant to manifest patterns of normative social behavior through the social, inferential practices of *shuo* and *bian*. The practices of *shuo* and *bian* suffice for the manifestation of normative patterns of social behaviors because these practices are governed by the semantic contents, the forms of normative social behaviors they aimed at making explicit. Thus, ideally speaking, they will come to embody the normative forms by being governed by them, and therefore manifest them. To repeat, the manifestations, through *bian* and *shuo*, of the space of reason, the justificatory network of *dao* and *li*, are governed by the very same justificatory network which is implicit in social practices, thus, ideally speaking, *bian* and *shuo* would eventually make the normative network completely explicit.[21] This also assures that the social practices of *bian* and *shuo* could gradually approach the objective norms.

[20] "What made a man a man? I say it is because he is capable of *bian*" (5/18/16).

[21] Xunzi says about the supreme of *bian* and *shuo* that "It is the sages' [practices] of *bian-shuo*: when [their] *shuo* prevails, the whole world will be just; when [their] *shuo* does not prevail, they simply have made *dao* explicit but live in obscurity and poverty" (22/110/10). The remark suggests that *bain* and *shuo* have the function of making *dao* explicit.

For Xunzi, norms neither exist independently of social practices, nor are manifested or instituted through moral feelings, nor even belong to the domain of nature. Rather, norms are constituted by and rooted in the practices of human beings. Norms are man-made, but this does not imply that they are subjective in the sense that whether we are in fact following them is determined by our own judgments, beliefs, or desires.[22] What determines the correctness of our following a rule? There is no other ground than the space of reason. We cannot step outside the realm of our social, rational practices to process any rational check. Rational practices have to take care of themselves. The kind of rule-following problem that makes sense is the kind that can be settled by making implicit norms explicit *via* our social, dialectic practices of *bian* and *shuo*. What does it mean to follow a rule? It is not to grasp an abstract proposition, to comply with normative feelings, or to have a natural response. Maybe Xunzi would agree with Wittgenstein that it is in belonging to a custom, practice, or institution that one follows a rule (see Wittgenstein 1967: SS. 198, 202).

References

Brandom, Robert. 1994. *Making It Explicit*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chen, Daqi 陳大齊. 1954. *Xunzi Xueshuo* 荀子學說 (*Xunziš Thought*). Taipei 臺北: Chinese Culture Publication Committee 中華文化出版委員會.

Cua, A.S. 1985. *Ethical Argumentation: A Study in HSUN Tzuš Moral Epistemology*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Hagen, Kurtis. 2002. "Xunzi's Use of *Zhengming*: Naming as a Constructive Project." *Asian Philosophy* 12: 35-51.

Hansen, Chad. 1983. *Language and Logic in Ancient China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

____. 1987. "Classical Chinese Philosophy as Linguistic Analysis." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 14: 306-330.

____. 1989. "Language in the Heart-Mind." In *Understanding the Chinese Mind*. Ed. by Robert E. Allinson. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Hutton, Eric. 2001. "Xunzi." In P. J. Ivanhoe and W. Van Norden, eds. 2001.

Li, Disheng 李滌生. 1979. *Xunzi Jishi* 荀子集釋. (*Collected Interpretations of Xunzi*). Taipei 臺北: Student Book 學生書局.

Mou, Zongsan 牟宗三. 1953. *Xunzi Dalüe* 荀子大略 (*An Outline of Xunzi*). Taipei 臺北: Central Cultural and Historical Relics Supplies 中央文物供應社.

Sellars, Wilfrid. 1956. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. In *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science 1*. Ed. by H. Feigl and M. Scriven. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stalnaker, Aaron. 2004. "Rational Justification in Xunzi: On His Use of the Term *Li* 理." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44.1: 53-68.

Van Norden, Bryan W. 1993. "Hansen on Hsün-tzu." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 20: 365-382.

Wei, Zhengtong 韋政通. 1974. *Xunzi and Ancient Philosophy* 荀子與古代哲學. Taipei 臺北: The Commercial Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1967. *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed, Ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.

Xunzi. 1996. D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 and CHEN Fong Ching 陳方正, trans. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press 商務印書館.

Yang, Liang 楊倞. 1976. *Xunzi* 荀子. In Sibubeiyao 四部備要. Taipei 臺北: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局.

[22] Xunzi is an objectivist with respect to the issue of the ontological status of norms only in a very minimal sense that what our mind approves might not accord with *li* (see 22/111/9-10).