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# *Míng* (名) as “Names” Rather than “Words:” Disabled Bodies Speaking without Acting in Early Chinese Texts

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“It is impossible by any convention, to make a blind man understand what is meant by the words red, green, or blue.”

Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *The Port-Royal Logic*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

My first scholarly article was about the work of A. C. Graham.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, I never met him but my copies of his books became so worn from over-use that I had to replace them.<sup>3</sup> My second, now equally worn, copy of *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* opens to a statement that inspires my work:

A consistent nominalism has to extend its principle to the particular utterances of the name itself; I pronounce the sound ‘stone’ over X and afterwards convey that Y is like X by pronouncing a similar sound.<sup>4</sup>

This claim has two important implications. First, in early Chinese texts the feature that makes one name (*ming* 名) the same as another is not an abstraction. Second, what makes one *ming* the same as another is a matter of pronouncing similar sounds. In this essay, I explore these two implications by analyzing illustrations of failures to name in early Chinese texts.

As Graham asserts, a *ming* consists in a sound pronounced over a thing. I have developed this claim by adding that *ming* and its frequent complement, *shi* (實 “action-thing”), constitute an aural/visual polar balance.<sup>5</sup> In light of the patterns of aural/visual pairing in early Chinese texts, the fact that *ming* are audible while *shi* are visible suggests a yin/yang type relationship, wherein a *ming* is not a *shi* and a *shi* is not a *ming*, but they unite.<sup>6</sup> This model departs in several ways from standard conceptions of *ming/shi* implied in translations like “names and objects,” “words and things,” and “language and reality.” Polarity is not necessarily characteristic of the relationships of names to objects, words to things, or language

to reality. The nature of the relations within these pairs is open to interpretation. For instance, while names could be non-objects, they might be a subset of objects. We might think of words as things, but we also might think of (ideal) words and (material) things as mutually exclusive. With regard to language and reality, we might conceive of each side as excluding the other, or we might posit that one is a portion of the other. Thus, the extent to which my claim deviates from traditional interpretations of *míng/shí* depends on how we conceptualize the relations within these pairs. Models of language also establish paradigms of the things to be named. My proposed model differs from the standard translation in its prototypical “named-things.” In ancient Greek texts, from which the standard translation equivalents ultimately derive, “*nomos*” is used to mean both “names” and “nouns.” Accordingly, the prototype of what is named is a substance. In early Chinese texts, a prototypical *shí* might be a fruit, with associated intimations of becoming full and useful. Early Chinese texts also use *shí* to mean “dividend” and “capacity.”<sup>7</sup> The unlikelihood of being both a substance and a quantity to be divided justifies considering the possibility that the standard translation equivalents might limit our understanding of uses of the term “*shí*.”

This essay extends my prior arguments by focusing on passages that discuss the utterances of blind and lame people in early Chinese texts, from which I infer that these disabilities epitomize the state of being only partly capable of using *míng*, insofar as a complete use of *míng* requires visibly acting, not just speaking. I contrast early Chinese texts’ treatments of visual or visible disabilities (blindness and lameness) with those of taste-impairment in order to advance my theory that the texts assume that naming (as something audible), should be complemented by action (as something visible). In other words, a *míng* is not like a word-type or its tokens, the correct use of which might simply require properly linking them together. As Graham says, *míng* are like the sound “stone” pronounced over X

and Y, to which I add that in the view of early Chinese texts, the correct sounds should be matched by visible acts such as picking a stone.

### **Background: Detached versus Immersed Views of Language**

To appreciate the first aspect of Graham's radical idea, it helps to stipulate an explicit contrast between "names" and "words." In this contrast, names are denotative, while words are connotative. In other words, names "refer," whereas words have "senses" or word-meanings.<sup>8</sup> The point of this contrast is not to say that anything that can be used as a name is necessarily different from something that can be used as a word, but to clarify why there are two terms at all. As terms whose function is identification, names are inherently grounded in material contexts. By contrast, for example, a word like "not" can be rooted in relations among words, rather than spatio-temporal things or events. We can also differentiate names from words by examining the idea of a dictionary.<sup>9</sup> Insofar as names simply "refer," names are rarely included in dictionaries because they have no word-meanings to be listed there. Word types and their word-meanings are the kind of thing included in dictionaries. Names are incorporated into dictionaries only if they are used as words. For instance, dictionaries do not contain "Smith," the name. The "smith" that appears in dictionaries reflects a usage like "a person who works with metal." From this perspective, we can see why Graham implies that early Chinese texts do not use "*míng*" to mean something like "word" as a type-token concept. Because it is an abstraction, that sort of concept does not conform to the nominalism he posits for Early China.<sup>10</sup> Graham's consistent nominalism implies that "stone" has the metaphysical status of a name, not a word-type.

The second significant implication of Graham's statement concerns thinking of *míng* as sounds, not written "sinographs" or an abstraction that might appear in either medium. The absence of theorizing about *the nature of abstract linguistic elements* in Early China (which,

of course, is not to say all abstract theorizing is absent) is consistent with the presence of a different kind of attention to language, and much can be inferred from the speech situations in which early Chinese texts present *míng*. I focus here on the fact that, of all the possible ways to illustrate not knowing a *míng*, texts from Early China often tell stories about physical disabilities, most notably, blind people speaking about color. Thus, to explore early Chinese concepts of *míng*, I look to something we seldom take into account when thinking about language: the context of utterances and the bodies that make them. In considering such bodies, I pay scant attention to the texts' own purposes. Instead, I start with the texts' overt normative goals, only to bracket them in order to foreground the semantic and epistemological implications implicit in marginal illustrations.<sup>11</sup> In this way, I argue that, while the trope of blind people's lack of color knowledge might be familiar from the dominant Western philosophical tradition, in early Chinese texts, the implications for the underlying conception of language are different.<sup>12</sup>

This analysis of early Chinese ideas about *míng* draws upon scholarship that contrasts “detached” from “immersed” approaches to language.<sup>13</sup> Detached approaches are those that involve, for example, conceptions of words having determinate meanings in isolation from their use in the context of an utterance. Detachment of that sort is implicit in metaphors about words having or transmitting word-meanings. That is, a statement like, “words have core meanings” implicitly posits word-meanings as abstractions belonging to abstractions (word-types). This common usage is typical of Formalist theories of language (such as those of Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky), which downplay the importance of fleeting individual moments of language-use. By contrast, immersed theories emphasize how material contexts and acts of use produce the meanings of utterances (and their components).<sup>14</sup> They identify the meaning of utterances by analysis of the situational factors related to it. In the

former case, meaning tends to be found in sentences, propositions, and words; in the latter, it lies in contextualized actions (utterances).

As an immersed approach to language, early Chinese texts use the term “*míng*” in ways that are different from technical uses of “word,” while resembling ordinary uses of “name.” To clarify the nature of uses of *míng* in early Chinese texts, as noted above, I use “name” to mean something that designates, and in particular, something that designates things or actions rather than linguistic abstractions. By “word,” I mean a unit whose identity is determined by some form of relation (possibly function or size) to other units in a language. This technical-sounding definition of “word,” is currently part of colloquial usage for many speakers. A less technical use of “word” would be something like, “May I have a word with you?”<sup>15</sup> As I use the term “name” here, a name is one way to talk about bits of speech—one that emphasizes not intra-speech function or unithood (as “word” might), but the designation of something external to speech.<sup>16</sup> Early Chinese texts use *míng* to mean “personal name,” in addition to using it to mean “fame” (as in “making a name”). In many ways, the uses of *míng* in early Chinese texts correspond to colloquial English uses of the term “name.” *Míng* function as labels of things or actions. In passages that call attention to *míng* labeling, the items that are labeled by *míng* are neither other bits of language nor bits of thought. Paradigmatically, *míng* point “outside,” rather than toward other *míng*.<sup>17</sup> That is, the primary functions that early Chinese texts ascribe to *míng* do not involve either what one might call “intra-*míng*” relations or relations to conceptual items or thoughts.<sup>18</sup> *Míng* select entities or actions. This includes things like “Yao’s dutifulness,” which we might think of as a concept, but can be understood as a description of his actions. *Míng* also appear to be more like names than words insofar as *míng* might not be the “building blocks” of speech. Passages that supply examples of *míng* never choose such words as modal particles, auxiliary words, or “logical words”—like “not” (*fēi* 非) or “thus” (*gù* 故).<sup>19</sup>

## Prefatory Remarks

The passages I discuss here come from a variety of early Chinese sources dating to different time periods. Some of the passages are from the synoptic *Mòzǐ* (fourth century BCE); one is from the “Later Mohist Canons” (third century BCE?); one is from the *Huáinánzǐ* (second century BCE); and one is from the *Yántiěnlùn* (first century BCE). It is likely that the later passages rework the stories from the earlier ones, but it is not an easy matter to determine the dates of the passages.<sup>20</sup> In any case, they feature a common thread that they refashion and reuse. I take the thread that unites these different uses to justify discussing them as being, in some sense, the same sort of passages, worthy of analysis in light of one another. The recycling of the passages suggests that they are not isolated cases, but rather they represent a familiar way of approaching a particular problem.

The passages sometimes use the term “*yán* 言” (speech) rather than *míng*, but several passages make it clear that naming is still at issue. For instance, the section from the *Mòzǐ* “*Guì Yì*” (discussed below) makes the fact that it is about naming explicit by mentioning a distinction between naming and picking (*qǔ* 取). Moreover, the passage from the *Mòzǐ*’s “*Fēi Gōng Xià*” chapter (discussed below) explains that the example of black and white is meant to illustrate the use of a particular name in relation to the actions (*shí* 實) to which it refers.

There are challenges to establishing that early Chinese texts treat the term “*míng*” like “name” rather than like “word,” not the least of which is the fact that the distinction itself is obscure. The most obvious evidence is the abundance of uses of “*míng*” to mean a sound, as well as the almost nonexistent uses to mean a written word, which I have discussed in other publications.<sup>21</sup> Here I will consider the rare passages where we can draw out something like the notion of a difference between a name and a word. These passages, which concern disabled people naming, suggest the unusual idea that it is possible to know how to use *míng*

independent of knowing the things to which they refer. They evoke a distinction between *míng* and the physical actions that demonstrate the presence of knowledge of *míng*. In this way, the passages do something rather extraordinary for early Chinese texts. While it might not strike contemporary readers as unusual to talk about knowing the meaning of words independently of knowing how to act on them, that kind of claim almost never occurs in relation to *míng* in early Chinese texts. Of course, early Chinese texts frequently contrast *míng* to action, but they rarely approach the subject of *míng* by attending to the correctness of a *míng* used independently of action. I will argue that these passages where the term “*míng*” is used little bit like “word” constitute additional evidence for my argument for two reasons: they highlight the referential use of *míng* and they do so specifically by characterizing *míng* as an audible phenomenon that should be paired with visible behavior.

Some of these passages I examine here extract *míng* from the context of their use by contrasting the correctness of *míng* as uttered to the actions that should go with *míng*. They imply that certain acts of naming or speaking are correct even though they necessarily fail to refer.<sup>22</sup> For the blind people who are asked to pick colors by name, a crucial piece of the context (the visible element) is lacking. In this way, the example of blind speakers draws attention to the possibility of thinking of the relationship of names (or naming utterances) to one another. In other words, because these uses of *míng* inevitably fail to connect to their referents, they end up being correct only insofar as they connect to one another. To that extent, we might say that the passages briefly entertain something like the idea of treating knowing how *míng* relate to one another as a form of knowing *míng*. They leave this knowledge unnamed, but we might call it quasi-knowledge, undeveloped knowledge, or “correct but inactive knowledge” of *míng*. The important point is that the texts implicitly acknowledge that blind speakers’ correct color naming is founded in knowing *míng* in relation to one another, and yet they do not pursue this way of thinking about *míng*.<sup>23</sup>



## Blind Naming Passages

Early Chinese texts criticize people who are corrupt or inefficient by means of blindness analogies—one of several tropes of physical disability. The contexts are not explicit, but passages that use blind people naming color as their sole illustrative example seem to concern problems like advocating ethical behavior, but not acting on it. Readers might be sympathetic to people who struggle to discern the difference between ethical and unethical behavior. Indeed, we might even feel grateful when people manage to *say* the right things about something like duty, even if they *do* nothing about it. But these tropes argue for the opposite: that is, at least blind people have an excuse. In other words, these disability analogies serve to condemn failures to act when one has the ability to do so. The assumption is that a person with a moral faculty can differentiate dutiful from undutiful behavior as easily as a sighted person can discern black from white.<sup>24</sup>

Like a ruler who speaks too lightly of duty, the targets of this rhetoric are people who are fully able to see what names refer to and perfectly capable of acting on them. Rhetorically, the disability has the force of making the able-bodied target of criticism look even worse. The point is that, despite their abilities, these people act like blind musicians who have been asked to name colors. Here is one example:

If you ask blind musicians, “What is plain white like?” they will say, “It is like unbleached silk.” If you ask them “What is black like?” they will say, “It is like dark.” But if you take white and black to show them, then they cannot locate (*chǔ* 處) them. That by which people look at white and black is the eye, and that by which they speak of black and white is the mouth. The blind musicians have the means to speak of white and black, but not the means to know (*zhī* 知) white and black. Thus in speaking of white and black, they are the same as other people, but in separating/discerning (*bié* 別)<sup>25</sup> white and black, they are different from other people.

問瞽師曰：「白素何如？」曰：「縞然。」曰：「黑何若？」曰：「黧然。」  
援白黑而示之，則不處焉。人之視白黑以目，言白黑以口，瞽師有以言白黑，  
無以知白黑，故言白黑與人同，其別白黑與人異。

(*Huáinánzǐ* 9 “Zhǔ Shù Xùn” 《主術訓》)

The blind people in these illustrations are capable of using names, but incapable of producing the actions that should accompany those sounds, because their eyes cannot see what action to take. Thus the passages contrast the blind people's ability to speak about colors with their inability to identify the referents.<sup>26</sup> In these illustrations, what the mouth does is speak, while the eye is supposed to guide the hand in the act of something that the texts call locating (*chǔ* 處), dividing (*fēn* 分), choosing (*qǔ* 取), distinguishing (*biàn* 辯), or separating (*bié* 別). Speakers must act in some visible way in relation to the referent about which they speak: whether by pointing, picking, embodying or something else. Hence, for example, a ruler's failure to act on his talk of duty might be a matter of failing to do something comparable to separating. He should use his eyes to locate (*chǔ* 處), divide (*fēn* 分), choose (*qǔ* 取), distinguish (*biàn* 辯), or separate (*bié* 別) dutiful behavior, and use his body to act on it.<sup>27</sup> That action might involve something like rewarding dutiful behavior or even behaving dutifully himself. Thus, the blind analogies might, for example, make the case that a ruler is faced with the task of showing that he can discriminate dutiful from undutiful behavior, just as the blind people are faced with the task of showing that they can discriminate black from white colors. The ruler, however, has the advantage of being able to see, hence there is no excuse for his failures.

The interesting feature of these passages is not limited, however, to the way they illustrate people failing to act. In fact, they specifically target the combination of being unable to act while simultaneously being able to talk about things. Without denying the correctness of blind peoples' color naming—indeed precisely in light of that correctness—the passages suggest that it has no value:

This is like blind people naming “white” and “black” names like other people, but not being able to divide (*fēn* 分) the things (*wù* 物). How can this be called discernment (*bié* 別)?<sup>28</sup>

此譬猶盲者之與人同命白黑之名，而不能分其物也，則豈謂有別哉。  
(*Môzǐ* 5.3 “*Fēi Gōng Xià*” 19 《非攻下第十九》)

Thus, blind people engage in a two-sided process. On the one hand, they name or speak, and on the other, they should divide (*fēn* 分) the things to which those names point. Only success in both constitutes successful “separation” or discernment (*bié* 別). Hence, the function of the blind people in such passages is not merely to illustrate an inability to act. It specifically illustrates the failure to act on the correct knowledge of names. In this way, the analogy criticizes people who do not live by what they say: that is, those who behave as if they are unable to put into practice their knowledge of names.

It is worth noting that, in one sense, there is nothing exceptional about these stories: the analogies to blind people speaking about color are consonant with a general keen interest in early Chinese texts in the idea of strategically employing speech and names. As the *Lúnyǔ* puts it, “If a *jūnzǐ* (gentleman) names it, it should necessarily be spoken. If a *jūnzǐ* speaks it, it should necessarily be done (*Lúnyǔ* 13/3).<sup>29</sup> Or, as the *Mòzǐ* says, “If the speech is sufficient to promote action, make it your standard. If the speech is not sufficient to promote action, do not make it your standard.” (*Mòzǐ* “Guì Yì”) We see this practical interest when the *Huáinánzǐ*’s discussion of a blind person’s failure concludes that people need to exhibit things in action (*xíng* 行):

It is dutiful to be filial towards one’s parents when inside, and loyal to one’s ruler when outside. Foolish or wise, worthy or not, everyone knows that. But rare are the people who exhibit loyal and filial actions or know the means to make them emerge.

入孝於親，出忠於君，無愚智賢不肖皆知其為義也，使陳忠孝行而知所出者鮮矣。

(*Huáinánzǐ* 9 “Zhǔ Shù Xùn” 《主術訓》)

In a similar way, the passage from the *Mòzǐ* “Fēi Gōng Xià” chapter (cited above) proceeds to make a point about the necessity for action:

Hence, the ancient wise people, in acting as the standard for the world, certainly compliantly considered their duty and only then acted on it.

是故古之知者之為天下度也，必順慮其義而後為之行。  
(*Mòzǐ* 5.3 “Fēi Gōng Xià” 19 《非攻下第十九》)

So too, the *Mòzǐ* “Gui Yi” passage implies that the blind people pass the test of using names correctly, but are not able to perform an action—the act of choosing.

If you mix white and black and cause a blind person to choose, they are not able to know. Therefore, when I say that the blind person does not know white and black, this is not because of their naming, but because of their choosing (*qǔ* 取).

兼白黑，使瞽取焉，不能知也。故我曰瞽不知白（墨）〔黑〕者，非以其名也，以其取也。

(*Mòzǐ* 12.1 “Gui Yi” 47 《貴義第四十七》)

This might imply that a blind person does know the names “white” and “black,” and yet does not know how to use the names for referring. Arguably, in the *Yántiēlùn* there is a different variation on this theme of blind people’s inability to act on their color naming. It compares the speech of the Ru (“Confucians”) to that of blind people, because they both sit and talk, without getting up and acting on what they say.

The blind can speak of “white” and “black,” but they do not have the eyes to separate/discern (*bié* 別) them. The mouths of the Ru can speak about “order” and “chaos,” but they do not have the ability to act on them. Now, when seated talk is not acted on, then shepherd boys are joined with the strength of Wu Huo, and the long-beards possess the potencies of Yao and Shun. Therefore, if they were caused to speak about the near at hand, how could the Ru dither about order and chaos and how could the blind dither about white and black? If you do not speak things aloud, then the shame of not embodying (*gōng* 躬) them will not catch up with you. Thus, cases where the lowly speak of the elevated and where there is an ability to speak but no ability to act: these are the sorts of things of which the gentleman would be ashamed.

盲者口能言白黑，而無目以別之。儒者口能言治亂，無能以行之。夫坐言不行，則牧童兼烏獲之力，（逢須）〔蓬頭〕苞堯、舜之德。故使言而近，則儒者何患於治亂，而盲人何患於白黑哉？言之不出，恥（窮）〔躬〕之不逮。故卑而言高，能言而不能行者，君子恥之矣。

(*Yántiēlùn* 7 “Néng Yán” 40 《能言第四十》)

In other words, it is inadequate to sit comfortably and chat about things that one cannot put into action upon standing up. The Ru in the *Yántiēlùn* passage responds by defending himself against this accusation with the claim that he has abilities to act, as well as to speak.<sup>30</sup> The

blind, the Ru, and those who are effectively lame (the young shepherds and old long-beards) all have something in common: they can speak, but they cannot act on the things they speak about. Thus, these passages use the example of disabled peoples' naming in order to criticize the failure to act on it. This emphasis on putting speech into action, or "walking the talk," is characteristic of the kind of interest in language often found in early Chinese texts.

### Criteria for the Correctness of a Name

To some extent then, these stories are typical, but their choice of a blind person as a trope is not random. There are good reasons why the texts often make this point using examples of the color-naming of blind people. Those reasons reflect the blindness of the person doing the naming and nature of the item that the eyes identify. Early Chinese texts presume that blind people are not only capable, but even proficient, in their sense of hearing.<sup>31</sup> Hence they will understand what they are asked to do. Moreover, color is strictly perceived by the eyes. Texts from Early China typically characterize the things that the eyes see as colors (*sè* 色), shapes (*xíng* 形), patterns (*lǐ* 理), bodies (*tǐ* 體), and walking/action (*xíng* 行).<sup>32</sup> Among them, only colors cannot also be perceived by the sense of touch. Thus, the unknown item is a color, which rules out assistance from other sensory faculties.

Setting aside for the moment the ultimate function of these analogies, we can see that the passages credit the blind people with being capable of naming color correctly. That is, it is safe to assume that the blind peoples' responses represent some level of correctness, because the *Mòzǐ* adds that the clear-sighted would not speak differently:

Now, blind people say, "That which is light<sup>33</sup> is white. That which is dark is black." Even the clear-sighted (*míngmùzhě* 明目者)<sup>34</sup> would have no basis to alter that. But [if] white and black are mixed together and [you] make the blind person select (*qǔ* 取) them, they are not able to know (*zhī* 知) [which is which].  
今瞽曰：「鉅者，白也。黔者，（墨）〔黑〕也。」雖明目者無以易之。  
兼白黑，使瞽取焉，不能知也。  
(*Mòzǐ* 12.1 "Guì Yì" 47 《貴義第四十七》)

The passage affirms the correctness of the sounds produced by the blind people, but at the same time, the choice of using blind people to speak about color makes it inevitable that the correctness of their utterances goes no further than equating sounds.

What are the grounds for assuming the correctness of these sounds at all? The passages propose two things that render these utterances correct. First, the blind people's utterances employ names in the same way as others do. The *Mòzǐ* "Fēi Gōng Xià" says, "This is like blind people naming 'white' and 'black' names like other people." And the *Huáinánzǐ* says, "Thus in speaking of white and black, they are the same as other people, but in separating/discerning (*bié* 別) them, they are different from other people." Second, the clear-sighted (*míngmùzhě* 明目者) would endorse this naming. They would not change how the blind people use names in these utterances. Hence, the correctness lies in two things: the fact that others commonly use similar names for white and black colors, and the fact that the clear-sighted would not alter the utterances.

As for social norms, they contribute to what makes these utterances correct, but the nature and extent of their contribution varies. Because the blind speakers cannot see dark colors, for instance, their utterances are entirely reliant on social norms about the habits associated with the *míng* "black" and "dark." That is, assuming these examples concern blindness from birth, the blind people's utterances only draw on the awareness that people commonly use the sound "black" in the same way as "dark." By contrast, if a sighted person had made the utterance, social norms would only contribute one element. In addition, a sighted person would see dark colors. Thus, while sighted people rely on social norms to know which *míng* pick out the colors that they personally see, the blind person relies on social norms exclusively without ever using *míng* to select colors. In other words, I take it that the capacity to say something like "Some hair is black," does not demonstrate a blind person's ability to connect *míng* to colors. This kind of assertion is simply an extension of linking *míng*

to each other according to social norms. On my reading, these “blind-utterances” are examples of equating *míng* in intra-*míng* relationships, because a blind speaker is incapable of making the *míng* refer to colors. The second component of what makes *míng* correct is not available to the blind people.

The specific reference not only to sighted people (the “others”), but to clear-sighted (*míngmùzhě* 明目者) people in the “Guì Yì” passages implies that, in addition to mastering the community’s habits for equating *míng*, correct naming requires visual ability. If people who are clear-sighted are experts at judging whether the blind person’s utterance needs to be altered, then assessing the utterance must in some way involve seeing dark colors rather than just knowing whether the utterance reproduces correct social norms for associating similar kinds of naming. As noted above, if the utterance came from sighted people, a background of seeing things would contribute to knowing which ones to call “dark.” More importantly, the passage presents clear-sighted people as knowing even better than ordinary sighted people which things to call “dark.” With their exceptional visual skills, these clear-sighted people function as experts who ratify color utterances. But the suggestion that clear-sighted people are singularly important judges of the blind person’s utterance is puzzling. It seems to deny the nature of the correctness of the blind person’s utterance even as it affirms it. If the correctness of the blind person’s utterance is merely a matter of duplicating social norms for associating *míng* to one another—(i.e. “Things that are dark are black” is correct simply because that is how “we” use these terms)—then the clear-sighted should not be singled out to judge the utterance. After all, the ability to emulate the way the linguistic community associates two *míng* is separable from the ability to observe things clearly. Nevertheless, the passage invokes the clear-sighted as judges, which means the ability to observe dark things must be relevant to assessing the correctness of a blind person’s utterance. Hence even though

the clear-sighted have no basis on which to *alter* the blind person's utterance, their mere presence as judges already signals that there is something wrong with it.

### Words and Names

Returning now to the distinction I described above between words and names, the legitimacy or value of these blind “*míng* equations” will differ depending on whether we interpret “*míng*” to be words, on the one hand, or names on the other. That is, it is possible to say either that the blind utterances “equate words” or that they “equate names.” Now, if this were a case of equating words (without going into what is entailed in equating one word with another), we could assert that the ability to equate one word with another in a correct way amounts to effectively knowing the word. In the case of equating names, however, it is less obviously true. That is, on the stipulated definition by which names refer externally, correctly equating one name to one another might not necessarily seem sufficient to count as a significant use of names. To explain my point, for simplicity, I will focus on the “*Guì Yì*” utterance, which says, “That which is dark is black.” The goal of the “*Guì Yì*” passage is, again, to make a normative point about fulfilling one's speech in action, and it makes this point by recourse to an illustration involving a blind person. By means of a stylistic parallelism, the “*Guì Yì*” passage offers an analogy between the utterance “That which is dark is black,” and the use of the *míng* “humane.” It says these two things:

1. “That which is light is white, and that which is dark is black.” Even those who are clear-sighted (*míngmùzhě* 明目者) would have no basis to alter/change (*yì* 易) that.

「鉅者，白也。黔者，（墨）〔黑〕也。」雖明目者無以易之。

2. Now, the gentlemen of the world's naming “humane,” even Yu and Tang would have no basis to alter/change (*yì* 易) that.

今天下之君子之名仁也，雖禹湯無以易之。

(*Mòzǐ* 12.1 “*Guì Yì*” 47 《貴義第四十七》)



On the model of naming things “humane,” we can take the blind person’s utterance to be talking about naming things “black.” In effect, it is saying, “That which is dark is [named] ‘black,’” just as it might say, “Benevolent [acts] are [named] ‘humane.’”<sup>35</sup> This is where the difference between “words” and *míng* becomes relevant. In the case of words, we might expect that knowing how to equate one word (“humane”) with other similar words (i.e. “benevolent”) in and of itself would seem to be enough to constitute knowing the word. But if, on the other hand, “humane” is understood as a name, things are a bit different. There seems to be something inadequate about only knowing how to equate the name “humane” with other names like “benevolent” that label similar actions. This also appears to apply to merely knowing that “black” names the same colors as “dark.” If we think of the *míng* in question as a name, not having knowledge of the color to which it refers seems more like a deficiency. Thus, the fact that the passages proceed to assess the utterances in terms of their uselessness, instead of in any way foregrounding the correct affirmations about the relationships of *míng* to one another, helps illustrate that *míng* resemble names more than words.

### **Why Blind People, After All?**

We could dismiss the invocation of the clear-sighted people in the “Guì Yì” passage as a byproduct of the *Mòzǐ* getting carried away with its own rhetoric. In favor of ignoring the reference to the clear-sighted, we might remember that the passage goes on to use the same pattern to say that the ancient sages would not change the way “gentlemen” use the name “humaneness.” Hence the comment about the clear-sighted might simply set the stage for that assertion. On the same lines, insofar as early Chinese texts often play with rhetorical extremes (blind versus clear-sighted, sages versus “gentlemen”), the comment might also be accounted for as a mere result of stylistic compulsion.

Nevertheless, a more interesting reading is worth considering. The presence of the clear-sighted judges and the way the passages brush past the correct blind “*míng* equations” bring us back to the choice of blind people in the first place. The premise of these examples is that blind people speaking about color is a good illustration of the problem of simultaneously knowing *míng*, in some sense, and yet not being able to put them to use. This would be the case only if it is customary to think of *míng* as occurring in concrete circumstances. In other words, insofar as these passages focus on the differences between blind and clear-sighted people naming colors, they reinforce the impression that early Chinese texts treat “language” as situated and treat the meanings of utterances as dependent on their interaction with the non-linguistic environment.<sup>36</sup> If it is plausible that, early Chinese texts present language as something that interacts with the non-linguistic environment, then the kind of bodies that use language becomes important. Considering the bodies that employ the language highlights some differences between *míng* and “word,” because, if the goal was to exemplify being in a state of knowing what words mean without knowing how to act on them, one might choose any sort of impairment. This does not happen in early Chinese texts. If *míng* were thought of as words, such partial knowledge of *míng* could be illustrated by having deaf people be asked to write about music and then fail a test of distinguishing sounds. Or taste-impaired people (more on this below) could be asked to speak about flavors and then show themselves to be unable to discern different tastes. It is by no means uncommon for early Chinese texts to employ other physical disabilities as pedagogical illustrations. However, blindness and lameness are the only disabilities used to demonstrate this particular idea: knowing how to equate names but at the same time not knowing how to use them in action.

### *A Cross-Cultural Perspective*

To pinpoint the specificity of this use of blind and lame analogies, let us take a quick and unsystematic comparative glance at disabled-person illustrations in the dominant Western philosophical tradition. They often involve blind people with color. As in my opening epigraph from *The Port-Royal Logic*, the illustrations sometimes concern the ability to use words, but even then, their focus is on the question of whether having knowledge without experience can be characterized as having certainty. In these examples, the disabilities are not limited to blindness. For instance, David Hume's use of the blind/color trope extends the examples to include the deaf. He writes,

A blind man can form no notion of colours; a deaf man of sounds. Restore either of them that sense, in which he was deficient; by opening this new inlet for his sensations, you also open a new inlet for ideas; and he finds no difficulty in conceiving these objects.<sup>37</sup>

Here, deafness serves as well as blindness, because the tropes address a much-debated question about whether linguistic knowledge without sensory knowledge can be certain. Examples of blind people's knowledge of color statements also sometimes function as illustrations of the uncertainty of faith claims, as in this example from the work of Søren Kirkegaard:

If you yourself have never been in love, you do not know whether anyone has been loved in this world, although you do know how many have *affirmed* that they have been loved...But whether they actually have loved, you cannot know; and if you yourself have loved, then you know you have loved. The blind person cannot know color differences, he must be content that others have assured him that they do exist and that they are thus and so. (Emphasis added).<sup>38</sup>

In other words, without the experience of faith or love, the only certainty you can have about such statements is your experience of having heard them. In these cases where language is contrasted to experience, there is no particular motivation for choosing disabilities related to vision as the examples. Thus, these passages that compare language to experience serve as a reminder that, while the disability illustrations might seem similar, putting language into action is not quite the same thing.

### *Lameness and the Motivation for Using Visual Disabilities*

The fact that early Chinese texts use lame people, in addition to blind people, to illustrate one particular kind of point increases the likelihood that the emphasis on visibility is highly motivated. In the context of Early China, lame and blind people both represent a disability pertaining to vision: the ability to act on certain kinds of naming utterances. Hence the addition of the lame reinforces the significance of vision in these stories. We have already seen that the *Yántiělùn* makes a case against what we might call “inactive name knowledge” by using figuratively lame people (old long-beards and young shepherds talking about exploits beyond their abilities), but it also uses literally lame people for the same purpose. The context is an accusation that the Ru display the vice of talking about things on which they cannot act.

[For the Ru], during the long period of over a thousand years since the foundation of the House of Zhou, there has been only Wen, Wu, Cheng, and Kang, to whom they would refer whenever they speak. They take up the unattainable and praise it, just like lame people who are able to speak about great distances but cannot walk them.<sup>39</sup>

自周室以來，千有餘歲，獨有文、武、成、康，如言必參一焉，取所不能及而稱之，猶躄者能言遠不能行也。

(*Yántiělùn* 2 “Lún Rú” 11 《論儒第十一》)

Here, the trope of lameness plays a role similar to that of blindness in the other passages. The accusation is that the lame people have the ability to speak about walking great distances, and yet they cannot act on that ability. They are able to talk, but not literally “walk” their talk. Thus, in both cases, the speech is correct, but a constitutional inability to put it into action precludes it from having merit. This is relevant because action is visible. The failure to walk is a visible failure, no less so than the blind peoples’ failure to use their hands to choose the right colors. According to the conceptions of sense perception in Early China, human action (*xíng* 行) or embodiment pertains to the field of vision.<sup>40</sup> This is subtly apparent when a

passage from the “Fēi Gōng Xià” chapter of the *Mòzǐ* pairs names with *shí* (實) in the sense of “actions.” Quoting more fully this time, the passage says,

Now the world agrees on dutifulness as being the method of the sage kings. Now the world’s feudal lords are alike in joining together in averting, attacking, and felling [each other]. Thus, this is having the name for praiseworthy dutifulness, but not inspecting the *shí* [the actions that are named dutiful]. This is like blind people naming “white” and “black” names like other people, but not being able to divide (*fēn* 分) the things (*wù* 物). How can this be called discernment (*bié* 別)?

今天下之所同義者，聖王之法也。今天下之諸侯將猶多皆免攻伐并兼，則是有譽義之名，而不察其實也。此譬猶盲之與人同命白黑之名，而不能分其物也，則豈謂有別哉。

(*Mòzǐ* 5.3 “Fēi Gōng Xià” 19 《非攻下第十九》)

The *míng* here is dutifulness, but the *shí* (實) that feudal lords display are acts of violence instead of duty.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the passage says that, upon hearing about a reputation for being dutiful, it is advisable to look to see if the actions fulfill that name. In short, it is important to match the sounds you hear with what you see, like two parts of a tally. Thus, the reason these passages can be illustrated with examples of lame people as well as blind people is that both disabilities involve a problem pertaining to the visible sphere, where one can see people put names into action by choosing colors and “walking the talk.”

### ***Taste-Impairment and the Motivation for Using Visual Disabilities***

It is instructive to contrast these cases to the way early Chinese texts achieve different rhetorical goals with other types of disabilities. For instance, the texts use the trope of taste-impairment to argue for a different kind of inconsistency: adhering to one’s values in minor cases while abandoning them in major ones. In contrast to the examples discussed above, this ethical inconsistency involves a failure in knowing how to speak about *míng* as well as failure to act on them. These cases employ the disabilities to support an argument that people who recognize wrongness in a single instance should also recognize wrongness on a large scale. The point is that if one does not know the latter, then one cannot be credited with knowing at

all. The passages mention blindness along with taste impairments, but blindness represents something different in these examples insofar as it is only one of the impairments used to illustrate a complete absence of knowledge. The passages feature a test of knowledge and then frame the results as a total failure.

Now if there is someone who, on seeing a little bit of black, says “Black,” but on seeing lot of black, says “White,” then we would certainly take this person to be someone who does not know the distinction (*biàn* 辯) between black and white. If there is someone who, on tasting a little bitterness, says “Bitter,” but on tasting a lot says “Sweet,” then we would certainly take this person to be someone who does not know the distinction (*biàn* 辯) between sweet and bitter. 今有人於此，少見黑曰黑，多見黑曰白，則〔必〕以此人〔為〕不知白黑之辯矣。少嘗苦曰苦，多嘗苦曰甘，則必以此人為不知甘苦之辯矣。(Mòzǐ 5.1 “Fēi Gōng Shàng” 17 《非攻上第十七》)

The second example is similar:<sup>42</sup>

Now, what if there is a person who, when being shown a little bit of black calls it black, but when being shown a lot of black, calls it white? He will certainly have to say, “My eyes are disordered and I do not know the separation (*bié* 別) between black and white.” Now, what if there is a person who, when he is able to taste a little sweetness, calls it sweet, but when he tastes a lot of sweetness, calls it bitter. He will certainly have to say, “My mouth is disordered and I do not know the tastes of sweet and bitter.” 今有人於此，少而示之黑謂之黑，多示之黑 謂白，必曰吾目亂，不知黑白之別。今有人於此，能少嘗之甘謂甘，多嘗〔之甘〕謂苦，必曰吾口亂，不知其甘苦之味。(Mòzǐ 7.3 “Tiān Zhì Xià” 28 《天志下第二十八》)

In contrast to the passages about knowing how to use names with other names, but not being able to put them into action, these passages elide the distinction between using names in relation to each other. In this way, they do not grant their disabled subjects any knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The passages present the failure to correctly name the larger quantity as completely invalidating what might have seemed like the correct assignment of names to the smaller quantity. In this kind of test, the disabled people do not get credit for knowing names in relation to one another any more than they get credit for knowing how to pick their referents.

These examples might allow us to say more about what it means to use *míng* correctly but without acting on them. There could be good reason why certain illustrations might include or exclude taste-impairments. The success or failure of an “act” of discerning a flavor occurs inside the mouth where witnesses cannot observe it, which makes it hard to confirm the knowledge of flavor. That is, suppose I were asked what “sweet” is, and I passed the test by saying “sugary.” Then suppose I was also given a piece of fruit and identified it as sweet rather than bitter. If “sweet” was a word, as distinct from a *míng*, my answer would suffice. If it was a *míng*, however, it seems that more would be needed. While my answer might be deemed correct, it still would not demonstrate that I actually had the ability to taste that particular fruit, rather than just the ability to use the name that my society associates with it. To determine whether people’s answers were rooted solely in the understanding of names (as distinct from also having an ability to taste), we would have to do two things: avoid telling the taste-testers what they were eating, and blindfold them. This idea of a blindfold, however, reintroduces the trope of blindness, thereby reaffirming that knowledge of *míng* can only be *demonstrated* in the absence of sight. Taste-impairment is not visible enough for witnesses to discern the difference between, on the one hand, being able to use *míng* in relation to things, and on the other hand, only being able to use *míng* in relation to each other. The fact that the passages do not use taste-impairment as an illustration of this difference confirms that a *míng* is not like a word, insofar as knowing *míng* requires visible pairing. Thus, the trope of taste-impairment has limited use in this context, but that limitation is not characteristic of the tropes of lameness and blindness. Hence, the use of taste-impairment to demonstrate total knowledge failure underscores, by contrast, the uniqueness of the situations represented by the blind and lame people who are credited with some degree of knowledge in naming. It is no coincidence that, when early Chinese texts illustrate an inconsistency between *míng* and action, they

choose a blind or lame person; whereas when they illustrate inconsistent behavior in minor and major circumstances, their illustrations might include taste-impairment.

### **The Legacy of Blind Naming in the *Mò Biàn*?**

The necessity of pairing names with something visible persists in the more abstract and decontextualized discussions of naming in later Mohist texts, even though the idea of disabled bodies drops out of the picture. The *Mò Biàn* arguably develops this pattern while transforming it. Instead of blind people naming colors, Canon B70 presents a situation in which sighted people hear the name of a color, but cannot see the color because it is inside a room. The Canon statement characterizes this as “knowing both” and the Explanation that follows describes why.<sup>44</sup> Although they cannot see the color in the room, they can see a color in front of them, and they hear that the color in the room resembles the one in front of them, which they know because they can see it. The Explanation that follows the Canon emphasizes visual clarity by saying, “Names are things that, by means of something clear (*míng* 明), corrects something unknown” (夫名以所明正所不智). Therefore, in Canon B70’s Explanation, the overheard name, by means of the visible color, settles the case regarding the unknown color that is not visible. If this is indeed a development from the earlier Mohist blind-naming scenarios, then the later Mohists no longer even take into account the idea of knowing colors *solely* by associations among names (blind people’s color knowledge). Instead, B70 replaces the blind people with sighted people naming colors in visually compromised situations. The later Mohist texts apparently contend that sighted people hearing the names of colors that they cannot currently see does constitute a kind of knowledge, but even if they consider this to be “knowing names,” such knowledge of names would still have a foundation in seeing.

Perhaps we should not assume this is “knowing names,” however, because the



Explanation to Canon B70 describes this kind of knowing as “knowledge by explanation” (*shōuzhì* 說智). “Knowing by explanation” also seems to require connecting *míng* to their referents. This kind of knowing is discussed in another canon, A80, which appears to describe three means of knowing.<sup>45</sup> The Canon’s Explanation contrasts knowing by explanation with knowing in person and knowing by hearsay. No part of Canon A80 implies, however, that there is a means of knowing that exclusively involves *míng*. Instead, the Explanation stipulates that *míng* must be understood in terms of relations to referents by saying, “*Míng* are things by which [something] is called,” to which it adds, “That which is called is *shí*.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the Explanation says that “joining” is a matter of a *míng* matching their referents: “*Míng* and *shí* matching is joining” (名實耦合也). Regarding “doing,” it says “Aims being enacted is doing” (志行為也). The second half of the Canon’s Explanation is more obscure, but nothing about it hints that *míng* can be known independently of *shí*. Hence, if this is the later Mohists’ development of the blind-naming scenarios, whether it is called “knowing names” or “knowing by explanation,” knowledge of *míng* still presumes that *míng* must match their referents.

My analysis of passages that use physical disabilities to argue for “walking the talk” allows us to glimpse some of the features of naming that early Chinese texts take for granted and rarely articulate explicitly. Comparing the illustrations supplies a context for understanding why they discount the kind of naming knowledge that they attribute to blind and lame people. It is not, as in my examples from the dominant Western philosophical tradition, that this knowledge has no basis in experience. It is not even *merely* the normative point that their knowledge of the names cannot be acted on (although it is that). In terms of the implicit semantic and epistemological ideas in these passages, the problem with blind and lame naming lies elsewhere. The sorts of things that do not appear in these passages are as telling as those that do. For instance, in early Chinese texts, people who are deaf and mute are

never tested on their knowledge of *míng*, and indeed never could be, because *míng* are bits of speech. Moreover, as we have seen, the difference between knowing flavors and merely knowing flavor names cannot be discerned without taking sight out of the equation. Thus, to make the direct contrast that passages are making, the illustrations must use people who can make sounds but not the visible actions that correspond to them. Hence the examples are people who are either lame or blind.

The insistence on transforming speech into action reflects a way of thinking about the human body's means of knowing. When the blind and lame people produce naming utterances, those are sounds. What is missing from their naming knowledge is not just action, but action understood specifically as something visible that complements the sounds. Paradigmatic knowledge of names involves pairing the aural and visual sensory functions: for example, looking to confirm what is heard, using one's eyes to select the things to which names refer, or using one's body to make what is said into an action visible to the eyes. The fact that *míng* need to be visibly acted upon explains why the passages dismiss mere knowledge of *míng* in their relations to one another. A "word," as distinct from a "name" in the sense described above, has identity and meaning that appears complete without needing to be situated in any concrete, responsive, temporal context of utterance. But a *míng*, even when used correctly in relation to other *míng*, does not conform to the paradigm of *míng* matching something visible. It is therefore deficient. Thus, we cannot fully understand the approach to naming in Early China unless we recognize the kinds of things that the texts take to be *míng*, the kinds of things they take to be the referents of *míng*, and their general understanding of embodiment. The texts presume that a crucial feature of reliable knowledge is the complementary relationship between sound and sight. What we learn about conceptions of language in Early China from these passages is that a significant element of naming knowledge is missing when no visible form accompanies the sounds that constitute naming.

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *The Port-Royal Logic*. Translated from the French with Introduction, Notes, and Appendix by Thomas Spencer Baynes (Edinburgh: James Gordon, Hamilton, and Adams and Co., London, 1861), 31.

<sup>2</sup> When I was completing my dissertation at the University of Chicago, Chad Hansen (my external advisor at the University of Hong Kong) urged me to try to grasp Graham's research on the *Mò Biàn* before formulating my own ideas about concepts of language in Early China. The outcome was my first publication, "A Critique of A. C. Graham's Reconstruction of the Neo-Mohist Canons," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 (1999): 1–11.

<sup>3</sup> My replacement copies include *Disputers of the Tao, Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, and *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978), 287.

<sup>5</sup> The association of *míng* with sound is evident in its use as "fame" (unfailingly described as being heard), as well as its interchanges with *mìng* 命 ("ordain"), and *míng* 鳴 (to refer to the sounds animals make). For the argument that *shí* 實—like *xíng* 行 and *xíng* 形—is one of the paradigmatically visible correlates of speaking and naming, see Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early China* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 121–127, and *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China: A Chinese Grammatology*, SUNY Press Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (forthcoming).

I gloss *shí* 實 as action-thing because it is sometimes used to mean action, and because even when it used to mean "thing," it is more like a thing-in-process than a substance. For the reasons why uses of *shí* in early Chinese texts should not be understood as "reality," see my analysis of *shí* 實 in *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early China*; "Grounding 'Language' in the Senses: What the Eyes and Ears Reveal about *Míng* 名 (Names) in Early Chinese Thought," *PEW* 60:2 (2010): 251–293; and *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China* (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> To say that a *míng* is a *shí* is paradoxical. This is evident insofar as, in the rare cases when that occurs, it appears to be done in jest. See, for example, *Wèi Liáo Zì* 24.2 "Bīng Lìng Xià" 《兵令下》.

<sup>7</sup> Karine Chemla writes, "The meaning of *shí* as 'capacity' is attested in a passage from the *Records on the scrutiny of the crafts* (*Kaogongji*, 考工記, dated to the third century B.C.E), which deals with standard vessels and is quoted in Liu Hui's commentary on Problem 5.25 [Chemla and Guo Shuchun, 2004, 450–453]." Karine Chemla, "On Mathematical Problems as Historically Determined Artifacts: Reflections Inspired by Sources from Ancient China," *Historia Mathematica* 36 (2009): 213–246, 242 n.54.

<sup>8</sup> I am calling this "word-meaning," because the complexity of the various uses of the term "meaning" often provokes confusion.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Ryle argues that names denote, rather than connote, and that they are "the words which do not appear in dictionaries." Against this, Jon Wheatley contends that there is no firm distinction between names and words. He asserts, "If we are going to talk about names in the context of meaning, then the obvious difference which seems to obtain between names and other words is that names do not importantly mean anything while ordinary words do." Wheatley might be right that the contrast can be overdrawn, but for understanding what is at stake in claiming that a *míng* in early Chinese texts is a name rather than a word, we have to begin with a sense of what that distinction entails. Gilbert Ryle, "The Theory of Meaning," in *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century*, ed. C. A. Mace (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), 247. Jon Wheatley, "Names," *Analysis* 25 (1965): 84.

<sup>10</sup> It is possible to postulate that word-types are only hypothetically existent, but that does not change the likelihood that the concept would not fit with Graham's idea of consistent nominalism. I discuss Sinologists' views on whether early Chinese texts treat *míng* as a word-type in other works. See Geaney, "Grounding 'Language' in the Senses," 279; and Geaney, *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China* (forthcoming).

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This characterization of *míng* as denotative is also consonant with another of Graham's insights about early Chinese views of language, "The Chinese opposition *míng/shí* 'name/object' is very unlike the Saussurian signifier/signified...there is consequently no tendency for...third entities on the same level as the objects and the sounds of names." A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle IL: Open Court 1989), 228.

<sup>11</sup> My method here is influenced by the work of Annmarie Mol, who argues for the benefit of paying attention to "exemplary situations"—the models and metaphors used in philosophical theories. (Annmarie Mol, "I Eat an Apple. On Theorizing Subjectivities," *Subjectivity* 22, no. 1 (2008): 28–37). This method is also informed by Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenological" discussion of the philosopher's writing desk, which brings the familiar into the foreground, and thereby demonstrates how philosophy might begin with actual bodies and their necessities. See especially the "Orientation Toward Objects" chapter of Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See below for more on the dominant Western philosophical tradition's illustrations.

<sup>13</sup> William Hanks outlines a similar contrast between different approaches to language in William F. Hanks, *Language and Communicative Practices*, Series Critical Essays in Anthropology (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Neither mode of thinking about language denies the effects of social norms on linguistic meaning.

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, this use is often filled in early Chinese texts by "one *yán* 言."

I should add that, when I refer to something as being a "name," I also mean something distinct from a "noun," because a noun is a type of word, whereas, in early Chinese usage, a *míng* is not a type of word. There is no technical concept of "word" of which a noun might be thought of as a type.

It is also important to keep in mind that Early Chinese texts also do not posit meanings as abstract entities (word-meanings) that are possessed by *míng*. See Geaney, *The Emergence of Word-Meaning*, SUNY Press Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Some of these same roles I am attributing to *míng* are ascribed to a lesser degree to "speech" *yán* 言, which are longer utterances that include *míng*. See Geaney, *The Emergence of Word-Meaning in Early China*, (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> My point is not that there can be no *míng* for things that are not visible. There are *míng* for all kinds of different entities like sounds and smells. The phrase "names and objects" does not imply that names only apply to medium-sized dry goods. In the same way, "language and reality" does not imply that there are no names for unreal or imaginary entities. See below for a case an example of the *míng* of a *míng* (or similarly naming a name) in the "Fēi Gōng Xià" chapter of the *Mòzǐ*.

<sup>18</sup> As Christoph Harbsmeier points out, "For Xunzi, as for all other early Chinese philosophers of language, the main concern is not in this way essentially tied up with a relation between two terms. Chinese philosophers of language were mainly concerned with the relation between names and objects/things." Christoph Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic*, vol. 7 of *Science and Civilization in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that a logical word cannot be part of a *míng*. A *míng* often includes the possessive *zhī* (之), as in someone being called "X 之 Y." My point is merely that something like *zhī* 之 is never foregrounded as an individual example of a *míng*.

<sup>20</sup> The time periods of these passages cannot be specified with precision. The image suggested by Erik Maeder—of loose-leaf binders rearranged with additions and deletions—nicely captures the difficulty of dating any individual passage or phrase. Erik W. Maeder, "Some Observations on the Composition of the 'Core Chapters' of the *Mòzǐ*," *Early China* 17 (1992): 28.

<sup>21</sup> Geaney, "Grounding 'Language' in the Senses," 251–293.

<sup>22</sup> For my purposes, the blind peoples' speech in these passages is relevant in a way that the usual use of the "X, Y 也" ("X equates with Y") formula is not. That is, there is seldom any reason to assume that the elements in an "X, Y 也" formula should be interpreted independently of some specific context, because the usage is usually exegetical.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding these Mohist illustrations, Chris Fraser aptly notes, "A natural response here would be to point out that the Mohists' own view implicitly recognizes that knowledge of words, or 'names', constitutes a separate type of knowledge, distinct from knowledge of how to 'select' things. The

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Mohists ought to categorize knowledge more finely, the response would run, by distinguishing between knowing how to use names and knowing how to distinguish the referents of names.” It is important that, as Fraser says, the texts implicitly recognize that the blind people’s color naming is knowledge. Even if they do not describe it as a separate type of knowledge, they subtly acknowledge it as knowing. Fraser adds that the later Mohist texts do this by mean of a fourfold categorization of knowing, which treats names, things, relations of names and things, and knowing how to act, as four independent forms of knowing. I disagree with this interpretation of Canon A80 for the reasons described in my discussion of Graham’s translation in Note 46 below. Chris Fraser, “Mohism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/mohism/>>.

<sup>24</sup> In early Chinese texts, colors are among the standard things that the eyes differentiate. Colors (and shapes) are used independently of items to which one might expect them to be attached. Thus, a color is, in effect, a thing, not a property of a thing.

The ability to differentiate black and white amounts to the ability to see, because blindness is the absence of that ability:

If eyes cannot determine the color of black from white, then call them blind. If ears cannot separate the sounds of clear from turbid, then call them deaf. If the heartmind cannot assess a position of gaining from losing, then call it crazy.

目不能決黑白之色則謂之盲，耳不能別清濁之聲則謂之聾，心不能審得失之地則謂之狂。  
(*Hánfēizǐ* 20 “Jiě Lǎo” 《解老》)

Thus, distinguishing black and white is fundamental. Apparently, is also easy.

If the ruler is sincere and clear about the speech of his ministers, then separating (*bié* 別) worthy from the degenerate is [as easy as separating] black from white.

為人主者誠明於臣之所言，則別賢不肖如黑白矣。

(*Hánfēizǐ* 44 “Shuō Yí” 《說疑》)

Black and white are easy to separate not because of the extent to which they contrast, but because they are visible. (For this argument, see Geaney, “Binaries in Early Chinese Texts: Locating Entities on Continuums” *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 3.2 (2016):275–292.) By contrast, seeing an autumn hair is a metaphor for a visual task that is not easy.

<sup>25</sup> Translations like separating/discerning are rather wooden, but I use them deliberately because of my interest in the way parts of speech (words or phrases) repeat themselves in different ways, often without our awareness, which is difficult to convey in more polished-sounding translations.

<sup>26</sup> To clarify my use of terminology, as I am using the word “referent,” a person who cannot see color cannot see the “referent” of the name, by which I mean, in these cases, the color (the *shí* 實, or the *wù* 物, as in *Mòzǐ* 5.3 “Fēi Gōng Xià” 19).

<sup>27</sup> In early Chinese texts, spatial separation is arguably constitutive of the identity of an action or a thing. I discuss this in “Binaries in Early Chinese Texts.”

<sup>28</sup> Chris Fraser rightly noted in his comments on a draft of this piece that the last phrase can also be read as asking how there can be any difference between the blind people and the targets of the passage’s criticism. But I stick to this translation because the use of *bie* 別 seems to refer back to the dividing (*fen* 分) of things.

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to Dan Robins for suggesting something like this translation of the line. More typically, *bì kě* 必可 is taken to mean “can” or “is able to,” but comparisons to other examples of the use of *bì kě* 必可 in early Chinese texts suggest that here it is not being used to mean, in effect, “it is certainly permitted but optional.” I discuss this line more in *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China* (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> The passage explicitly evokes the discussion in *Xunzi* 27 (“Dà Lǚ”) about acting on one’s speech. My tentative translation of the passage is:

Those who are able to speak and yet unable to act are the treasure of the state. Those who are able to act but unable to speak are the tools of the state. The gentleman has both. Those who lack one are the shepherd boys and the long beards. The mouth says it and the body enacts it. How is that like silently holding an official post and going through the motions like a corpse?

能言而不能行者，國之寶也。能行而不能言者，國之用也。兼此二者，君子也。無一者，  
（烏獲）〔牧童〕、（逢須）〔蓬頭〕也。口言之，躬行之，豈若默然載施其行而已。  
(*Yántiēlùn* 7 “Néng Yán” 40 《能言第四十》)

My translation follows commentators who emend *shī* 施 “bestow” to *shī* 尸 “corpse.”

<sup>31</sup> The assumption seems to be that proficiency in sound compensates for deficiency in sight. For example, the *Huáinánzǐ* says,

Now in the case of blind people, their eyes cannot separate day from night or divide white from black, however, when they grasp the qin and pluck the strings, triply plucking and double pressing, touching and plucking, pulling and releasing, their hands are a blur and they never miss a string.

今夫盲者，目不能別晝夜、分白黑，然而搏琴撫弦，參彈復徽，攬援標拂，手若菴蒙，不失一弦。

(*Huáinánzǐ* 19 “Xiū Wù Xùn” 《脩務訓》)

Sarah A. Queen and John S. Major translation modified. John S. Major, Sarah Queen, Andrew Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, trans. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, by Liu An, King of Huainan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 778, 682. The *Wénzǐ* says something similar.

A tortoise lacks ears, but its eyes cannot be occluded. Its *jīng* 精 (refined essence) lies in clarity. Blind people lack eyesight, but their hearing cannot be occluded. Their *jīng* 精 lies in keen hearing.

（鼈）〔鱉〕無耳而目不可以蔽，精於明也；瞽無目而耳不可以蔽，精於聽也。

(*Wénzǐ* 6 “Shàng Dé” 《上德》)

<sup>32</sup> See appendix to Geaney, *Language as Bodily Practice* (forthcoming).

Incidentally, this means that the texts do not imply that blind people cannot use names to refer. They only imply that they cannot rely solely on vision to use names to refer visible things.

<sup>33</sup> Some commentators emend *jù* 鉅 “great” to *ái* 皚 “white,” as in snow. I do not translate it as “things that are light,” because that would make it like the property of a thing, rather than a thing itself. It seems that it should be thought of as “lights” or “brights,” as one might say of sorted laundry.

<sup>34</sup> In early Chinese texts, the use of *míng* 明 in the context of the eyes generally indicates clear-sightedness, not just sightedness. *Míng* 明 and *cōng* 聰 are refined characteristics, typical of a sage. While the *Shizi* contains a passage wherein those who are called *míngmùzhě* 明目者 seem ordinary (*Shizi* 尸子 1 〈卷上〉 1 · 12 處道), in this *Mòzǐ* passage, the parallel between the *míngmùzhě* 明目者 and the sages (Yu and Tang) indicates that they are exceptional, like the sages: “Now, the gentlemen of the world’s naming ‘humane,’ even Yu and Tang would have no basis to alter that.” (今天下之君子之名仁也，雖禹湯無以易之。) Thus, the *míngmùzhě* is to the blind as Yu and Tang are to the “gentlemen of the world.” Other passages that support this include the following:

Seeing the sun and moon does not count as clear eyesight (*míngmù* 明目). Hearing thunder rumblings does not count as keen hearing (*cōngér* 聰耳).

見日月不為明目，聞雷霆不為聰耳。

(*Súnzǐ* 4 “Xíng Piān” 《形篇》)

As the *Guǎnzǐ* puts it:

The eyes are in charge of looking. Looking must accompany seeing. If one sees and inspects, call it *míng*...If one sees and does not inspect, then it is not *míng*, and if it is not *míng* then there are mistakes.

目司視，視必順見，見察謂之明。。。視不察不明，不察不明則過。

(*Guǎnzǐ* 4 “Zhòu Hé” 11 《宙合第十一》)

<sup>35</sup> The sentence that follows the utterance about dark colors being black comes from the interlocutor, the eponymous Mozi, and informs us that these blind people cannot select black colors, not that they cannot select dark colors. Thus, the text is treating black colors and dark colors as interchangeable.

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Hence my choice of “benevolent” and “human” is supposed to represent two terms with very similar uses (so similar, in fact, that both are often used as translations of *rén* 仁).

<sup>36</sup> I put “language” in quotes because by some definitions what I am describing is merely speech and names.

<sup>37</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (London: A Millar, 1777), E. 2.7. Accessed from [www.davidhume.org](http://www.davidhume.org) (Peter Millican and Amyas Merivale 2001-2012).

<sup>38</sup> Søren Kirkegaard, *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Esson M. Gale, translation modified. *Discourses on Salt and Iron: A Debate on State Control of Commerce and Industry in Ancient China, Chapter I-XXVIII: Translated from the Chinese of Huan K'uan, with Introduction and Notes* (Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Pub. Co., 1967), 13.

<sup>40</sup> See Note 5 above. The following things are associated with vision: “walking” (*xíng* 行), “action-thing” (*shí* 實), embodying (*tǐ* 體), and treading (*lǚ* 履).

<sup>41</sup> This passage draws attention to the visibility of *shí* 實 by mentioning a need to inspect (*chá* 察) the *shí* of the name “dutiful.” While it has broader uses, the term *chá* 察 is often used to mean specifically inspecting by means of the eyes. See appendix to Geaney, *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China* (forthcoming).

<sup>42</sup> This second passage supplies more of the speech of the disabled people and uses some different terms, but these are not relevant to my point.

<sup>43</sup> They not only flatly deny the knowledge, but also do not mention that the disabled people speak the way others do or say things that experts would not change.

<sup>44</sup> The “knowing both” is ambiguous, but we might take it as meaning that both the name and the color are known.

<sup>45</sup> The grounds for thinking it is about knowing is that “knowing” (*zhī* 知) is the first graph in the Canon statement.

<sup>46</sup> Canon A80 does not introduce four objects of knowledge, as Graham claims. (Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, 30–32). Graham’s argument is based on something that I view as a misreading of a list of seven terms in the canon statement of Canon A80, three of which he views as means of knowing—*wén* 聞 (hearsay), *shōu* 說 (explanation) and *qīn* 親 (in person). In light of the Canon’s Explanation, this part of his interpretation is plausible. But without providing any justification, Graham asserts that the other four—*míng* 名, *shí* 實, *hé* 合 (join), and *wèi* 為 (do)—are “objects” of knowing and even “disciplines,” each inherently separate from the other. Evidence in the Canon’s Explanation, however, undermines the persuasiveness of this. There is no reason to assume *míng* or *shí* constitute a separable and independent objects of knowledge when the Explanation proceeds to assert that they function together: “*Míng* and *shí* matching is joining” (名實耦合也). See Geaney, “A Critique of A. C. Graham’s Reconstruction of the Neo-Mohist Canons.”