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HANSEN ON HSÜN-TZU

No one who is interested in Chinese philosophy seems capable of being *indifferent* to the work of Chad Hansen. At one extreme, the late, brilliant A.C. Graham claimed that Hansen had provided the key to understanding the white horse paradox.¹ In addition, David Hall and Roger Ames draw on Hansen's speculation about the nature of the classical Chinese language in their much-discussed book *Thinking Through Confucius*.² At the other extreme, a number of Sinologists, perhaps most notably Christoph Harbsmeier, have suggested that Hansen provides little evidence for his radical conclusions and has not responded to evidence against his theories.³

Given so much controversy, it behooves us to look carefully at Hansen's arguments. Hansen has much to say on a number of topics related to Chinese culture. A full treatment of his published work would be book-length. The aim of this paper is more modest. I propose to examine critically one aspect of Hansen's thought. Specifically, I shall be concerned with Hansen's claim that Hsün-tzu^a is a "conventionalist" about morality. But what exactly is a moral "conventionalist"? As we shall see, this term can mean several things. Hansen is careful to distinguish several of these senses; however, I hope to show that there is still some ambiguity in Hansen's own use of the term "conventionalist." Furthermore, I want to suggest that Hansen has not provided adequate textual support for his thesis.

Hansen offers the most detailed argument for his interpretation of Hsün-tzu in his *Language and Logic in Ancient China*.⁴ In this work, Hansen distinguishes two kinds of linguistic conventionalism, which he labels the "weaker" and "stronger" versions. He explains,

The weaker version of conventionalism treats the sounds or symbols we use as social conventions, properly used as long as they are mutually recognized by a language community. Simply put, what we call *horse*, we could as well have called *ox*.⁵

Hansen clearly wants to identify *at least* the following doctrine as "weak conventionalism." Consider the word "ox" and the animal the ox. It happens that, because of historical accident, we happen to use the word "ox" to refer to the animal the ox. However, it could have turned out, had history been a little different, that we used some other word to refer to this particular animal. We *might* have used the word "horse" to refer to oxen. There is nothing intrinsically appropriate about referring to the animal the ox by the name of "ox," as opposed to the name "horse." We just happen to do it that way.⁶ The claim that all words are like this is at least part of what Hansen means by "the weaker version of conventionalism." Weak conventionalism seems obviously true as soon as one thinks about it, and almost all the major philosophers who have had anything to say about language, East and West, have asserted some version of weak conventionalism.⁷

There is another sense in which words are obviously conventional, however. Not only are words conventional in the sense that it is a matter of convention what their referents are, words are also conventional in the sense that which combinations of phonemes are words and which are not is a matter of convention. So, for example, why are "horse" and "ox" words in English, but not "blef" and "patwango"? The answer is that it is just a matter of convention that the former phonetic strings are words in English, while the latter are not. If history had been different, either "blef" or "patwango" (or both) could have been words of English, while either "horse" or "ox" (or both) would not.⁸

I assume that Hansen would agree that words are conventional in this sense as well; however, I do not know whether he intends "the weaker version of conventionalism" to include this claim. His description of the doctrine suggests that it is broad enough to include this claim, since he says that it "treats the sounds or symbols we use as social conventions,

properly used as long as they are mutually recognized by a language community." However, Hansen's example of the weak conventionalist thesis suggests that he means it to include only the sort of conventionalism I explained earlier: "Simply put, what we call *horse*, we could as well have called *ox*."

More is at stake here than some "foolish consistency" in word usage. For, as we shall see, Hsün-tzu is careful to make a distinction that Hansen obscures. I suspect that Hansen may have misread Hsün-tzu in part because of a failure to recognize that he distinguishes these two sorts of weak conventionalism. Whatever Hansen means by "weak conventionalism," though, I shall use the phrase in this paper to refer to both of the kinds of weak conventionalism I have just described.

Hansen then goes on to distinguish weak conventionalism from "the stronger version," which

holds that not only the sounds and symbols are conventional, but so is the associated practice of division. The way of dividing reality into objects to be named (totally apart from what symbols or sounds the community uses) is also a function of common acceptance of a shared and conventional practice of classification or division.

The conventionalism in China tends toward the stronger version. Naming is just making the distinctions, and the distinctions themselves are merely conventional — socially agreed-on ways of dividing up the world.⁹

I do not find this description of strong conventionalism very clear. It is made even harder to understand by the fact that Hansen immediately goes on to declare that strong conventionalism

does not necessarily land one in Taoist relativism, for one may allow that there are in some sense "correct" distinctions which should be reflected in socially accepted language, that is, the theory of rectification of names.¹⁰

What is strong conventionalism, and how can a strongly conventional distinction be correct (in whatever sense of the word "correct" Hansen is indicating by his use of scare-quotes)? I can think of at least *three* things that Hansen might have in mind by strong conventionalism.

One natural way of understanding the way Hansen has characterized strong conventionalism is the claim that there are no distinctions in the world intentionally picked out by the distinctions made in language. I shall label this "universal strong conventionalism."¹¹ Universal strong conventionalism is a very problematic doctrine, though. In order to see *why* it is problematic, consider the following example. Say that universal strong conventionalism is true, and I am taught the linguistic distinction between oxen and non-oxen. Now, what do I do when I run across some "new" animal (i.e., one not previously encountered by my linguistic group), and I want to decide whether it is an ox or not? The natural thing to say, I imagine, is that part of learning how to use the word "ox" is learning that an ox has a certain shape or appearance, which distinguishes oxen from things that are not oxen.¹² So, it seems that all I have to do when I encounter a new animal is determine whether its appearance is like that of an ox or not. If this new animal looks like an ox, I call it an ox; if it doesn't look like an ox, I don't. But here's where universal strong conventionalism gets us into trouble. In order for it to be true, it has to be the case that there aren't any distinctions between things in reality, independent of the distinctions made by my language.¹³ However, if this animal I encounter really does resemble an ox, then that means that there is a distinction in reality independent of my language. It *is* the case, then, that some animals resemble oxen while others resemble horses and still others resemble neither.

Moreover, in order for universal strong conventionalism to be true, it must be the case that there is no non-arbitrary way of deciding how a word should be used in new cases.¹⁴ If there were a non-arbitrary way of determining whether a given word applies to some new case, then that would have to be because there were some distinctions in the world, independent of convention, which we could use to guide our application of the word in new circumstances. But if universal strong conventionalism were true, then when we encountered any new part of reality, the only

thing to do would be to decide, purely arbitrarily, that we were going to call it "ox," or "horse," or "microwave toaster oven," or "aardvark," or whatever. And it would not make any difference which category we chose to put something in, because "the distinctions themselves are merely conventional."¹⁵

So strong conventionalism, if understood in this first sense, seems obviously false as a description of how any natural language actually works.¹⁶ However, perhaps Hansen is describing something else by the name "strong conventionalism." A second thing that "strong conventionalism" might be is the claim that *only the distinctions marked by moral terms are conventional*. In other words, maybe what Hansen means by strong conventionalism is the claim that, while non-moral words like "ox," "horse," "white," etc. track distinctions that exist independently in the world, moral terms like *jen*^d and *yi*^e mark distinctions that are purely conventional. I shall label this view "partial strong conventionalism," since it holds that only a part of our language is strongly conventional.

At first glance, it might seem that partial strong conventionalism falls prey to the same problem as did universal strong conventionalism. For how can I succeed in correctly applying phrases like *jen* and *pu jen*^f to new situations unless there is some distinction in the world, independent of the conventional distinctions of language, to guide my application of *jen* and *pu jen* to new situations?

One might hold the following, however. One might claim that for every distinction marked by any moral term there is some non-moral distinction to which it corresponds. However, this would still leave open the possibility that moral distinctions are simply conventional, because it might turn out that it is merely a matter of convention which moral distinctions get associated with which natural distinctions. A.C. Graham provided an interesting example of disagreement about moral terms in the introduction to his translation of *The Inner Chapters* of the *Chuang-tzu*:

. . . the basic ethical term for all schools was *yi*, translatable as "duty." For Confucians it is the conduct traditionally prescribed for the various social relations, for example

between father and son or ruler and subject; but the Mohists, who criticised accepted morality on utilitarian grounds, formulated in the *Canons* the new definition "To be 'dutiful' is to be beneficial."¹⁷

So, for the Mohists, the distinction between the beneficial and the non-beneficial marks the distinction between what is *yi* and what is *pu yi*^g. According to Graham's (admittedly simplified) picture of Confucianism, the Confucians recognize that there really is an objective distinction between what is beneficial and what is non-beneficial, but they deny that this distinction is what distinguishes *yi* from *pu yi*. Consequently, strong conventionalism might be the claim that it is simply a matter of convention which non-moral distinctions are paired with which moral distinctions. In other words, partial strong conventionalism is the claim that it is simply a matter of convention whether we use the Mohist, the Confucian, or some other moral language.

Interestingly, there is a Western precedent for this view. Partial strong conventionalism, as I have described it, seems to be the sort of position J.L. Mackie defended. Mackie held, notoriously, that "... values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world. . . ." ¹⁸ Yet he is careful to note that his position does not commit him to the sort of absurdities that we saw follow from universal strong conventionalism:

How could anyone deny that there is a difference between a kind action and a cruel one, or that a coward and a brave man behave differently in the face of danger? Of course, this is undeniable; but it is not to the point. The kinds of behaviour to which moral values and disvalues are ascribed are indeed part of the furniture of the world, and so are the natural, descriptive, differences between them; but not, perhaps, their differences in value. It is a hard fact that cruel actions differ from kind ones, and hence that we can learn, as in fact we all do, to distinguish them fairly well in practice, and to use the words "cruel" and "kind" with fairly clear descriptive meanings; but is it an equally hard fact that

actions which are cruel in such a descriptive sense are to be condemned?¹⁹

To be sure, some Western philosophers have doubted whether what Mackie suggests is possible. John McDowell famously suggests that there is no way of mastering the correct application of moral terms without sharing the evaluations built into them. Thus, for example, to accurately use the word *jen* in the way Confucians do, one must share Confucian values.²⁰ But while Mackie may be mistaken, his position is not, unlike universal strong conventionalism, evidently absurd.

The third thing that Hansen might have in mind I shall label "pragmatic strong conventionalism." This is the view that, although there really are non-conventional distinctions in reality, independent of language, *which* of all the distinctions in reality are recognized by any given language is a matter of convention. For example, one language might have words to mark the distinction between 55 different species of fish, while another might have only one word for all fish. (Perhaps this is because the former is the language of a fishing community, which needs a way to make precise distinctions between kinds of fish, while the latter is the language of a community that does not fish.) In some sense, it would be a matter of convention which distinctions in reality were recognized by each language. I am inclined to think that pragmatic strong conventionalism is true; at the least, it is a plausible view. I have no objections if Hansen wishes to attribute pragmatic strong conventionalism to Hsün-tzu. However, Hsün-tzu cannot be distinguished from other early Confucians (or from other pre-Han thinkers in general) by his acceptance of pragmatic strong conventionalism. I do not know of any early Chinese thinker who would deny it. I suspect that Hansen wishes to attribute something much more radical to Hsün-tzu.

So there are at least three different things that Hansen might mean by "strong conventionalism." Whatever he means by it, though, Hansen seems to want to describe Hsün-tzu as a strong conventionalist. At one point, he asserts that

The main source of the basic differences in the pre-Han

schools grows out of their differing degree [sic] of acceptance of the conventionalism of language. The least accepting would be the Mohists, who thought there were objective standards of value and distinctions . . . and the Mencius wing of Confucianism, for whom a prelinguistic discriminatory and evaluative mind was a basic assumption. "Realistic" Confucianism, concerned with the rectification of names, entailed (and in the work of Hsün-tzu, openly embraced) the conventionalism of language; the assertability²¹ of an utterance (a judgment or distinction) was only a function of community acceptance.²² Chuang-tzu gleefully pushes the point to complete subjectivism. . . .²³

In what sense does Hansen think Hsün-tzu is a strong conventionalist? In a footnote, he claims that "Hsün-tzu. . . is not committed to prelinguistic natural kinds. . . antecedent natural kinds or categories."²⁴ This suggests that Hansen wishes to ascribe to Hsün-tzu the universal strong conventionalism I explained earlier. As we saw, this form of conventionalism is not particularly plausible philosophically. More to the point, it seems that Hsün-tzu explicitly denies this form of conventionalism. In his famous essay, "Rectifying Names," Hsün-tzu states that we establish names for things according to the "categories" (*lei*¹) and "essences" (*ch'ing*¹) of things as determined by the senses.²⁵ So it looks like, for Hsün-tzu, there *is* some extra-conventional standard for judging linguistic distinctions — i.e., similarity as determined by the senses.

Perhaps Hansen does not actually want to attribute universal strong conventionalism to Hsün-tzu, though. Perhaps he wishes to attribute to Hsün-tzu only partial strong conventionalism. Hansen's most elaborate statement of Hsün-tzu's alleged conventionalism is the following:

The "realist" Confucian version of the rectification of names theory is seldom cast in terms of absolute correctness of the sages' use of names. Rather the argument (both in *Analec*s 13:3 and *Hsün-tzu*) is that the sage provides a single model which can coordinate and harmonize the way people

make evaluative distinctions, cultivate attitudes, make choices, and act. The objection to nontraditional use of names is not simply that they are wrong, but that they confuse, complicate, and disorder the society. Implicitly, the argument seems to allow that *any* way of assigning names that was universally adopted (and met survival and effectiveness criteria) would be acceptable.

Confucian and Burkian [sic] traditionalism have in common this appeal to an argument from anarchy. They do not claim that the traditional values are rationally justified, but that messing with it [sic] will create chaos.²⁶

In a footnote to this passage, Hansen observes, "Objective or absolute justifications of 'realist' traditionalism are available by making maximizing survival and effectiveness the test of *the correct* system of names (*tao*^k)."²⁷

There are at least two distinct arguments in this passage. At some points, Hansen seems to be suggesting that there are some criteria for evaluating linguistic schemes, and that among these criteria are the tendency of the schemes to maximize "survival" and "effectiveness." But the survival and effectiveness of what? Presumably what Hansen has in mind is that certain linguistic schemes—certain ways of distinguishing *yi* from *pu yi*, *jen* from *pu jen* — when adopted by a community, increase the likelihood that that community will survive. Moreover, certain linguistic schemes are more effective in promoting (among the people who adopt these schemes) the sorts of attitudes, choices, and actions that they are supposed to promote. For example, a linguistic scheme that was cumbersome, hard to learn, highly ambiguous, and the like, would *not* be effective in promoting whatever attitudes, choices and actions it was supposed to promote among those who used it. One can use these criteria, then, to judge linguistic schemes. It might turn out, as Hansen suggests in his footnote, that there is one particular linguistic scheme that is most efficient in producing the greatest likelihood of survival for the community that adopts it. This would then be *the* correct linguistic scheme. Alternatively, it might turn out that several schemes

are all equally efficient in producing the greatest likelihood of survival for the community that adopts them. In this case, any of the schemes is equally justifiable.

At other points in the same quoted passage, however, Hansen seems to suggest a very different sort of argument. Sometimes he seems to suggest that there is *not* any way to evaluate competing linguistic schemes. Instead, one should just adhere to the traditional linguistic scheme, whatever it may be, because no alternative linguistic scheme is any better (or worse) than the traditional scheme, and the process of changing to an alternative scheme would be chaotic. In addition, chaos, the argument assumes, is worse than the status quo (so long as the status quo is not itself chaotic). This line of argument is suggested by Hansen's comment that "Confucian and Burkian [sic] traditionalism have in common this appeal to an argument from anarchy. *They do not claim that the traditional values are rationally justified*, but that messing with it [sic] will create chaos."²⁸ But surely, if a linguistic scheme maximally satisfies the survival and effectiveness criteria, then it *is* rationally justified, isn't it?

So it looks like there are at least two positions that Hansen attributes to Hsün-tzu. Position (1) is that the Confucian way of using words like *jen* and *yi* is justified because that way is *the way* (or, at least, *one* of the ways) of using those words that efficiently maximizes the survivability of the community that adopts it. Position (2) is that the Confucian way of using words is not rationally justified, but any attempt to change to another way of using words is bound to lead to chaos, and this would be worse than the status quo.

Now things get interesting, because it is not obvious how to relate positions (1) and (2) to partial strong conventionalism. Is position (2), for example, even *consistent* with partial strong conventionalism? One natural way of reading position (2) is as claiming that social chaos (and, presumably, the human suffering consequent upon it) is objectively bad, and that anyone who prefers chaos to order is simply in error. But this is an objectivist position, not a conventionalist position.²⁹ Position (1), likewise, seems most naturally read as an anti-conventionalist position. Isn't Hsün-tzu just claiming that the Confucian way of using language

meets objective criteria for evaluating language schemes?

Does Hansen say anything about Hsün-tzu that is consistent with strong conventionalism? Yes. Hansen writes, in a passage I quoted earlier, that Hsün-tzu embraced the claim that "... the assertability of an utterance (a judgment or distinction) was only a function of community acceptance."³⁰ This seems to be a statement of strong conventionalism (universal strong conventionalism, in fact). Is there any textual evidence that Hsün-tzu actually held such a view? I have been able to locate only two passages, both from "Rectifying Names," which Hansen cites as evidence for this surprising attribution to Hsün-tzu. Hansen uses a slightly modified version of Wing-tsit Chan's translation of these passages.³¹ The first of these passages refers to the accomplishments of the sage kings in fixing names:

In this way [rectifying names] the traces of their accomplishments spread. The spreading of traces and the achievement of results are the highest point of good government. This is the result of careful abiding by the conventionality of names.³²

The only part of this passage which bears on Hansen's claim is the word "conventionality," which is a translation of the Chinese *yueh*¹. Hansen relies upon this word to do a lot of work in making his argument, but while *yueh* could conceivably mean something like "strong conventionality," there are certainly alternative ways to translate it. Burton Watson renders the crucial line, "All of this is the result of being careful to see that men stick to the names which have been agreed upon."³³ In a similar vein, Homer Dubs translates the line, "This was the benefit of being careful in preserving the terms which had been agreed upon."³⁴ Neither of these translations commits Hsün-tzu to anything like strong conventionalism. Why should we opt for the reading Hansen proposes?

The second passage Hansen cites is also from Chan's translation of "Rectifying Names":

Names have no correctness of their own. The correctness

is given by convention. When the convention is established and the custom is formed, they are called correct names. If they are contrary to convention they are called incorrect names. Names have no corresponding actualities by themselves. The actualities ascribed to them are given by convention. When the convention is established and the custom is formed, they are called names of such and such actualities.³⁵

This seems to me to merely be a statement of what we labeled above "weak conventionalism." Weak conventionalism, you will recall, has two parts. First, it claims that it is a matter of convention which combinations of phonemes are words and which are not. Second, weak conventionalism asserts that the connection between a particular symbol and the thing that it is a symbol for is arbitrary and contingent. This seems to be all that Hsün-tzu is asserting in this passage. He begins by noting that names lack any intrinsic appropriateness (*ku yi^m*), that they are made appropriate by convention (*yueh*) and custom (*suⁿ*). I take it that the point is simply that, for example, the reason "dog" is a word in English while "blef" is not, is that "dog" has been agreed upon as a word and "blef" has not. There is no "intrinsic appropriateness" to the word "dog" which "blef" lacks. "Blef" could have been an English word (and "dog" a meaningless series of sounds) had the convention been different.

Next, Hsün-tzu states that names lack any intrinsic referent (*ku shih^o*), that they are given a referent by convention (*yueh*) and custom (*su*). This, too, is just weak conventionalism. Why does "ox" refer to oxen instead of dogs? Simply because that is the convention or custom. What could be more straightforward and unambiguous than this?

So not only is Hansen's textual evidence sparse, for his interpretation of Hsün-tzu as a strong conventionalist, but his interpretation of that textual evidence is implausible. But perhaps the most convincing reason for thinking that Hansen's interpretation is wrong is that it contradicts the plethora of passages in which Hsün-tzu commits himself to objectivism, rather than conventionalism. Consider a few examples:

In the world there are not two Ways. The sage is not in

two minds.³⁶

Through rites Heaven and earth join in harmony, the sun and moon shine, the four seasons proceed in order, the stars and constellations march, the rivers flow, and all things flourish. . . . When they [i.e., the rites] are properly established and brought to the peak of perfection, no one in the world can add to or detract from them.³⁷

Music is unalterable harmonies. The rites are unexchangeable patterns.³⁸

The Way is the proper standard for past and present.³⁹

That which everyone in the world, past and present, calls "good," is that which is correct, well-patterned, peaceful, and well-ordered. That which they call "evil" is prejudiced, dangerous, perverse, and chaotic.⁴⁰

If Hansen is to defend his strong conventionalist reading of Hsün-tzu, then he must explain away these seemingly non-conventionalist remarks. So far, Hansen has not produced a plausible theory which accounts for them. Interestingly, Lee Yearley, in an undeservedly neglected paper, has made an effort to solve this very problem.⁴¹ Yearley argues there that Hsün-tzu's objectivistic comments are part of his "exoteric" doctrine, intended for the less sophisticated, while his non-objectivist comments are part of Hsün-tzu's real, "esoteric" doctrine. This solution is ingenious, but — as I hope I have shown — it is possible to read the allegedly conventionalist passages so that they commit Hsün-tzu to only weak conventionalism, so Yearley's heroic measures are unnecessary. Furthermore, I submit that Yearley's suggestion is problematic for other reasons. To begin with, in contrast with Plato, there is no tradition of Hsün-tzu having esoteric teachings. Secondly, how are we to determine which of Hsün-tzu's writings are exoteric and which are esoteric? Why not regard the conventionalist writings (if there are any) as an exoteric attempt to use the presuppositions of radical conventionalism against it?

In his forthcoming *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, Hansen admits that there is a tension between the conventionalism he wishes to attribute to Hsün-tzu, and the latter's seemingly anti-conventionalist

remarks. However, Hansen merely asserts that Hsün-tzu held the conventionalist position at one point in time and the anti-conventionalist position at another time, and offers no explanation of how or why Hsün-tzu went from one position to the other.⁴² What is needed, however, is some plausible account of the development of Hsün-tzu's views. In the absence of this, it will always be more plausible to interpret the handful of allegedly conventionalist passages as anti-conventionalist (or, failing that, as interpolations) rather than posit an utterly mysterious paradigm shift in Hsün-tzu's thought. Given the lack of textual evidence for Hansen's account, it would not be sufficient for him to provide an account of the development of Hsün-tzu's thought from anti-conventionalism to conventionalism (or vice versa), but providing such an account is necessary, if his thesis is to be plausible.

The purpose of this article has been largely negative. I hope I have shown that (1) it is unclear what position Hansen wishes to attribute to Hsün-tzu, and (2) Hansen has provided no persuasive evidence for attributing either universal or partial strong conventionalism to Hsün-tzu.⁴³ I hope to provide my own detailed positive account of Hsün-tzu's "Essay on Rectifying Names" in a future essay.⁴⁴

NOTES

A version of this paper was read at the ASPAC conference at West Washington University in Bellingham, CA, on June 21, 1991. I am indebted to Derk Pereboom for detailed and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. "The Disputation of Kung-sun Lung as Argument about Whole and Part," *Philosophy East and West* 36:2 (April 1986), pp. 89-106 (reprinted in his *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 193-215). However, see also Graham's mixed review of Hansen's *Language and Logic in Ancient China* in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45:2 (1985), pp. 692-703.
2. Albany: SUNY Press, 1987, pp. 261-264, 299. Note, however, that Hall and Ames insist that their "disagreements with Hansen's views are, perhaps, of greater significance" than their agreements (p. 263).

3. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Marginalia Sino-logica," in Robert Allinson, ed., *Understanding the Chinese Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 125-166, and "The Mass Noun Hypothesis and the Part-Whole Analysis of the White Horse Dialogue," in Henry Rosemont, ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991), pp. 49-66.
4. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983 (hereafter cited as "Hansen"). See the reviews of this book by Graham (cited in footnote 1, above) and Philip Ivanhoe (*Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews* 9 (1987), pp. 115-123). Hansen's forthcoming *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (a draft of which Hansen has very graciously shown me) might seem to be a more natural place to begin, but in this later work Hansen does not provide any additional textual evidence in support of his reading of Hsün-tzu as a conventionalist, nor does he provide a clear statement of what conventionalism is. (I am not even certain Hansen is using the word "conventionalism" in the same sense in both works.) I shall make some brief comments about *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* at the end of this paper.
5. Hansen, p. 62.
6. I have restricted my discussion to words and their referents. Many philosophers of language, of course, follow Frege in distinguishing between word, sense and referent. For Frege, the relationship between the word and the sense is conventional, but the relationship between the sense and the referent is not. Sense is what determines the referent. But even a Fregean would have to admit that the connection between a word and its referent is conventional, even if the connection between the sense and the referent is not. See "On Sense and Meaning," in Peter Geach and Max Black, eds., *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), third edition.
7. In the *Cratylus*, Plato seems to defend the claim that certain strings of phonemes are intrinsically suited to refer to certain things. However, here (as always when reading Plato) it is important to be alert to the possibility that Plato is being ironic.
8. This claim has to be understood with certain qualifications. The words in any given language are composed out of a particular set of phonemes. Consequently, there might be a reason why a certain string of phonemes could not be a word in a given language: that string might be composed of phonemes that did not occur in the language in question. In addition, there are historical reasons why a given string of (allowable) phonemes finds its way into a certain language. This kind of weak conventionalism is not intended to deny that there are historical reasons why "horse" is a word in English. All it denies is that there is some mysterious, intrinsic appropriateness which makes "horse" fit to be a word (independent of historical circumstances). I have

not explicitly discussed Chinese characters, but they are conventional in ways analogous to the ways the phonetic strings of a language are conventional. Chinese characters seem not to be at issue in Hsün-tzu's discussion in any case, as he refers to *ming*^b rather than *tzu*^c.

9. Hansen, p. 62.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Strictly speaking, universal strong conventionalism is consistent with the claim that there *are* distinctions among things in the world, so long as these distinctions do not happen to be intentionally picked out by the distinctions made in language. For simplicity's sake, I shall only discuss the version of universal strong conventionalism that assumes there are no distinctions in reality at all, but what I say applies, mutatis mutandis, to the other version of universal strong conventionalism.
12. Advocates of what is sometimes called "Direct Reference Theory" or "The New Theory of Reference" hold that the reference of natural kind terms such as "ox" and "water" is not determined solely by empirical similarity of sensible things. (See Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" in his *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), especially Lecture III.) Direct Reference Theorists agree, though, that universal strong conventionalism is false. I am not interested in defending any particular philosophy of language, in any case. Rather, all I want to do is to point out that on *any* plausible view, universal strong conventionalism must be false.
13. Or, more precisely, it has to be the case that the distinctions in language do not intentionally pick out any distinctions among things in reality (whether there are any distinctions in reality or not).
14. Or, more precisely, it must be the case that there is no way of deciding how a word should be used in new cases that appeals to the way things really are or appear.
15. Hansen, p. 62.
16. Of course, it is not Hansen's fault if some Chinese philosopher holds a view that is patently absurd. I hope to show later in this paper, though, that Hansen has provided no evidence that Hsün-tzu, at least, holds universal strong conventionalism.
17. A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Boston: Mandala, 1986), pp. 10-11.
18. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 15.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
20. See McDowell's "Virtue and Reason," in S. Clarke and E. Simpson, eds., *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989),

especially §6; and his "Non-cognitivism and Rule-following," in S. Holtzman and C. Leich, eds., *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

21. "Assertable," remember, is how Hansen renders *k'o*^h.
22. Oddly, Hansen states elsewhere that "Confucian rectification of names theory [presupposes] that there is some real basis for the distinctions marked by names." (Hansen, p. 106.)
23. Hansen, p. 98.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 190, n. 26.
25. Cf. Burton Watson, *Hsün-tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 142. Note that Watson renders *lei* and *ch'ing* as "species" and "form," respectively.
26. Hansen, pp. 79-80. Emphasis in original.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 182, n. 46. Emphasis in original. One wonders what difference Hansen means to signal by writing "correct" in italics here, but in scare-quotes in the passage from p. 62 (vide supra).
28. *Ibid.*, p. 80. Emphasis mine.
29. It is logically possible that Hsün-tzu holds that it is simply a matter of convention whether we disvalue chaos and human suffering. But is there any textual evidence that he holds such a view? I am aware of no such evidence. Below I consider Hansen's alleged textual evidence.
30. Hansen, p. 98.
31. Hansen does not note the modifications. Cf. Hansen, p. 182, r. 48.
32. Hansen, p. 81. The bracketed phrase is supplied by Hansen.
33. Watson, p. 141.
34. *The Works of Hsüntze* (Taipei: Confucius Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 486.
35. Hansen, p. 81.
36. "Dispelling Obsession." Cf. Watson, p. 121.
37. "A Discussion of Rites," translation by Watson, p. 94.
38. "A Discussion of Music." Cf. Watson, p. 117.
39. "Rectifying Names," translation by Watson, p. 153.
40. "Human Nature Is Evil." Cf. Watson, p. 162.
41. "Hsün Tzu on the Mind: His Attempted Synthesis of Confucianism and Taoism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 39:3, p. 476. Yearley's paper has independent value as a study of Hsün-tzu, beyond his effort to rescue Hansen's untenable thesis. Those interested in Yearley's paper should also see David Nivison's critique of it, "Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu," in Henry Rosemont, ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991), pp. 129-142, and A.C. Graham's response to Nivison's paper, *ibid.*, pp. 283-286.
42. Hansen does gesture toward some such accounts, but he never develops any

in detail. Overall, I have found it very difficult to understand what Hansen is trying to say about Hsün-tzu in his most recent work, except that he obviously finds Hsün-tzu wildly incoherent. I leave it to some more perseverant interpreter to unravel for us Hansen's position in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*.

43. Again, I think Hsün-tzu would accept pragmatic strong conventionalism, but this does not serve to distinguish him from any pre-Han Chinese thinkers or from most philosophically-sophisticated contemporary Western thinkers.
44. I do not think it is necessary for me to provide such an account prior to criticizing Hansen's arguments. Even if it is necessary to have an overall interpretation of one's own before one can intelligently criticize another interpretation, I have provided such an overview of Hsün-tzu's philosophy in my "Mengzi and Xunzi: Two Views of Human Agency," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32:2 (June 1992). An interpretation similar to mine is developed in Philip J. Ivanhoe, "A Happy Symmetry: Xunxi's Ethical Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59:2 (Summer 1991), pp. 309-322.

CHINESE GLOSSARY

a	荀子	i	類
b	名	j	情
c	字	k	道
d	仁	l	約
e	義	m	固宜
f	不仁	n	俗
g	不義	o	固實
h	可		

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