Realism about Kinds in Later Mohism

Chris Fraser
University of Hong Kong

Abstract

In a recent article in this journal, Daniel Stephens argues against Chad Hansen's and Chris Fraser's interpretations of the later Mohists as realists about the ontology of kinds, contending that the Mohist stance is better explained as conventionalist. This essay defends a realist interpretation of later Mohism that I call "similarity realism," the view that human-independent reality fixes the similarities that constitute kinds and thus determines what kinds exist and what their members are. I support this interpretation with a new, detailed account of the Mohist conception of a kind on which kind relations lie in inherent similarities between the intrinsic features of objects. This account distinguishes kind relations from "uniting together" and part-whole relations, both of which, unlike kind relations, may be determined by convention. I argue that Stephens's critique of realist interpretations fails because it confuses the ontological issue of what determines the existence of kinds with the semantic issue of what fixes the names for kinds.

Introduction

What makes a horse a horse, according to classical Chinese texts that address the relation between "names" (*ming* 名) and the world? What explains why the general term "horse" applies to all and only horses? A widely accepted answer in early Chinese discourse appealed to the concepts of sameness (*tong* 同) or similarity (*ruo* 若, *ran* 然) and difference (*yi* 異). Individual members of the kind *horses* count as horses and take the name "horse" by virtue of sharing the same or relevantly similar characteristics, such as their shape and features, which are different from those of non-horses. This explanation raises a further, more fundamental question, however. What determines whether some group of animals possesses the relevant similarity?

One possible answer is suggested by book 2 of the *Zhuangzi*.[1] Much as the reference of the indexicals "this" and "that" is determined by how speakers use these words in a particular context, whether things count as relevantly similar, and thus of a kind, is determined by whether speakers deem them such. "A *dao* (way) is formed by proceeding along it; things are 'so' [*ran* 然, or similar each other] by being called so" (Hung 1956a: 2/33).[2] One way of construing this claim is that what counts as a relevant similarity, and thus explains why the same kind name—the same general term for a

[1] For the purposes of discussion, I am claiming here only that this answer is suggested by the *Zhuangzi*, setting aside the issue of whether it is indeed the best interpretation of the text.
[2] This and other concordance texts cited can be accessed through the concordance page at the Chinese Text Project, edited by Donald Sturgeon, https://ctext.org/tools/concordance.

kind—is used of different individuals, is determined by speakers' practices for picking things out by that name. Let's call this view "strong constructivism," as it implies that the similarities that constitute kinds are constructed by our practices, not by how things are in themselves, independently of our practices.

Another possible answer is presented by Xunzi, who holds that the similarities that guide the use of general terms—and thus what explains why certain animals take the name "horse"—are the product of social conventions constrained by natural conditions. Xunzi's theory invokes three factors. One is how the features of things affect human sense organs. The sense organs of creatures of the same kind detect things in the same way, he suggests, enabling us to agree on what is the same or different (Hung 1966: 22/16–17). The second is social conventions. Given the similar responses of our sense organs, a speech community led by a wise ruler will form conventions about what things to consider relevantly similar, and thus members of the same kind, taking the same general name (Hung 1966: 22/16–17). The third is pragmatic efficacy. Ultimately, what *dao* and thus what norms for distinguishing kinds and using general terms a speech community adopts depends on what practices align with natural conditions, yielding sociopolitical order and economic prosperity. For Xunzi, then, what makes a horse a horse are social conventions understood to be grounded in causal relations between human-independent features of things, human perception, and our practical ends.[3] We can label this view "Xunzian conventionalism."

A third major early source that treats the issue is the later Mohist "Canons." How do the Canons relate to the views just described? One interpretation, introduced by Chad Hansen and developed by Chris Fraser, is that the Canons present a realist stance.[4] On this reading, unlike either strong constructivism or Xunzian conventionalism, for the Canons, the similarity relations that make a horse a horse and that relate all horses as members of the kind *horse* are fixed by inherent features of the animals themselves, independently of human judgment, practices, or conventions. This view can be considered a brand of realism specifically in the sense that the similarities which make individuals members of the same kind (*lei* 類) are determined by reality alone, without input from human attitudes or activity. Kind relations are thus part of the human-independent world.[5]

In a recent article in this journal, Daniel Stephens argues against what he takes to be Hansen's and Fraser's realist interpretation of the later Mohist position, which he characterizes as "kind-realism," the view that "there is some correct scheme of kind-terms that carves the world at its joints" (Stephens 2017: 521). Stephens contends that the later Mohists are better explained as presenting a form of conventionalism about kinds, which he construes as the position that there is "no fixed, correct set of kinds," but

[3] For a detailed discussion, see Fraser 2016: 305–316.

[4] See Hansen 1992: 239–240, and Fraser 2005/2015, sect. 6.1. Fung Yulan attributes a naive realist epistemology to the later Mohists but without discussing semantic issues (Fung 1948: 119).

[5] As Hansen says, "Reality fixes the range of natural kind terms" (Hansen 1992: 240). Fraser says that for the Mohists, "the difference between kinds such as oxen and horses is fixed independently of our cognitive activity" (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1)

rather "schemes of kind terms [are] determined by conventional decisions that occur during disputation" (Stephens 2017: 521). The Canons, he proposes, are committed to what he calls "context-realism" and "objective-answer-realism" (to be explained in section 3) but not to "kind-realism" (Stephens 2017: 522).

The present essay clarifies, develops, and defends what I take to be the original realist interpretation, shared by Hansen and Fraser, that Stephens calls into question, along the way presenting a new, detailed account of the Mohist conception of a kind. To help distinguish the various realisms at stake, I will call the view Hansen and Fraser attribute to the Canons "similarity realism." Similarity realism is the ontological stance that human-independent reality fixes the similarities that constitute kinds and thus determines what kinds exist and what their members are.[6] As I will explain, this stance is distinct from the "kind-realist" view Stephens criticizes, which is actually a semantic view about what determines the reference of names for kinds, as his remarks above about "kind terms" indicate. I will argue that Stephens's critique of the similarity realist interpretation rests on a systematic confusion between the ontological issue of what determines the existence of kinds and the semantic issue of what fixes the names for kinds. He equates the claim that "there is some correct or privileged set of kinds" with the significantly different claim that there is "some right way of using names" for kinds (Stephens 2017: 522).

The case for attributing similarity realism to the later Mohists turns on their treatment of two topics: what kinds are and how the reference of kind names is fixed. Accordingly, the first section below examines the later Mohist conception of a kind (*lei*) and argues that the Mohists' understanding of kinds already commits them to similarity realism. Stephens disagrees, because he construes the relevant passages in the Canons differently. As I will explain, however, because of how his discussion conflates ontological and semantic issues, his interpretation assumes, rather than argues for, a conventionalist view of kinds.

The next section examines the Mohists' view of how the reference of names for kinds is settled, in particular when interlocutors disagree or are unsure about what kind they are referring to. Close interpretation of the relevant canons strongly suggests that the Mohists are committed to similarity realism. Here again I consider and rebut Stephens's interpretation of pivotal passages in the texts.

The final section goes on to argue that, in the context of later Mohist thought, the distinction Stephens attempts to draw between "context-realism," "objective-answer-realism," and "kind-realism" collapses, because for the Canons realism about what kinds exist, understood according to similarity realism, follows from what Stephens calls "context-realism" and explains why there is an objective answer to questions such as whether a

[6] Both Hansen's and Fraser's discussions make it clear that this is the issue they take themselves to be addressing. Hansen says, "we call one thing by a name. The external similarities and differences then determine what else we must call by that name" (Hansen 1992: 241). Fraser characterizes realism, in the context of the Canons, as "the view that the world in itself fixes the patterns of similarity and difference by which things should be divided into kinds" (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6).

particular animal is a horse. Once this point is clarified, it becomes apparent that Stephens himself is committed to the same similarity realist interpretation as Hansen and Fraser, since he agrees that, for the Canons, similarities are determined by inherent features of things and not by human agreement. His apparent disagreement with them arises chiefly from a failure to distinguish ontological issues from semantic ones. As he presents it, "kind-conventionalism" is the view that human agreement determines what kinds the names we use refer to, not what kinds exist or what objects constitute those kinds. I will suggest that on this semantic issue the later Mohists are straightforwardly conventionalist. But conventionalism on this point is consistent with, not contrary to, realism concerning the ontological question of what kinds exist and what their members are.

The ontology of kinds and the semantics of kind terms are of intrinsic interest as prominent issues in metaphysics and philosophy of language. But the positions treated here have a broader significance as well, reflected in the *Zhuangzi* remark cited above implying a parallel between a *dao* being formed by proceeding along it and things being "so" because we call them so. Early Chinese theorists emphasized that the proper use of names was both a guide to and part of the performance of *dao*, the ethically and politically appropriate way of conduct. Hence to them claims about the basis for using names in certain ways may reflect a broader stance about the basis for a certain account of *dao*. If constructivism, conventionalism, or realism provides a correct account of the distinctions that guide the use of kind names, an extension of that account might also explain the distinctions that guide conduct more generally.[7]

1. The Later Mohist Conception of a Kind

The first step in interpreting whether the later Mohists are realists about kinds is to understand their conception of a kind. Canons A86–A87 introduce the notion of a kind, or *lei* 類, as one of four relations by which things can count as the same or different.[8]

> A86
>
> 經：同。重，體，合，類。
>
> 經說：同。二名一實，重同也。不外於兼，體同也。俱處於室，合同也。有以同，類同也。
>
> Canon: Same. Identity/overlap, part, united, kind.
>
> Explanation: (Same.) Two names for one object is the same in being identical/overlapping. Not being external to a whole is the same in being parts of the same thing. Both together in a room is the same in

[7] I thank an anonymous referee for prompting me to include this paragraph.

[8] The text and translation of excerpts from the Canons used here are my own, as emended from the Ming dynasty *Dao Zang* 道藏 text. The numbering system agrees with that in Graham 1978. Canon numbers refer to the text of both the canon and the associated explanation.

being united. Having that by which they're the same is the same in being the same kind.

A87
經：異。二，不體，[9] 不合，不類。
經說：異。二必異，二也。不連屬，不體也。不同所，不合也。不有同，不類也。
Canon: Different. Two, not parts, not united, not of a kind.
Explanation: (Different.) Two surely being different is being two. Not connected or belonging is not being parts. Not being in the same place is not being united. Not having something the same is being different kinds.

Among the four types of sameness, only sameness in being the same kind refers to distinct things sharing some intrinsic feature that is the same.[10] The first type of sameness refers not to distinct things but to identity, as when the referent of one name is actually one and the same thing as the referent of another. An example given in canon B40 is that "dogs" and "hounds" are "overlapping" names that refer to the same animals. The second type, sameness in being parts, refers to things being the same in being parts of the same whole. Such things count as the same not because they share any similar intrinsic feature but because of their relation to some whole. An example—adapted from the later Mohist "Greater Selection"—would be that a human finger and a human head are not the same in their features—their shape is different, for instance—but my finger and my head are the same in being parts of my body. The third type, sameness in being united together, refers to things being the same in sharing the same location. Objects that are the same in this respect need not share any intrinsic features at all; a horse, a wheel, and a hammer could count as "the same" in all being located in the same barn, for example.

Taking up a suggestion by Robins, I propose that the third type of sameness, sameness in being "united," need not refer only to sharing the same location (Robins 2012: 372). The Mohists could take sharing a location to illustrate a more general notion of sameness in being united together by some extrinsic relation, as contrasted with things being the same in their intrinsic features.[11] One reason this interpretation seems plausible is that a fragment in another later Mohist text, the "Greater Selection," lists the same

[9] Inserting 不 by parallelism with the explanation.
[10] By "intrinsic feature" here, I mean a feature of things considered in themselves, such as their physical features. I will contrast intrinsic features with extrinsic relations and functions, such as where something is located or what it is used to do.
[11] Here I construe sameness in uniting together considerably more broadly than do Graham or Fraser, who interpret it roughly as compresence, an example being the joint presence of the hardness and whiteness of a white stone. See Graham 1978: 335, Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6, and Fraser 2013: 13. The "compresence" interpretation can be considered a special case of the "uniting" interpretation proposed here.

four types of sameness, specifying that they are four ways in which things can take the same name, but relabels "united" as "all together" or "jointly" (*ju* 具).[12] An advantage of this interpretation is that by generalizing the "uniting" relation, it clarifies the significance of the contrast between sameness in being united and sameness in being the same kind. "Uniting" refers to things that take the same name because of some extrinsic relation in which they stand. For example, horses sharing the relation of being located in the state of Qin take the name "Qin horses"; people sharing the relation of being followers of Mozi take the name "Mohist"; and animals sharing the relation of being used to pull loads take the name "draft animal." These constitute a different sort of case from being inherently similar in some respect.

Unlike the previous types of sameness, sameness in being the same kind (*lei*) is explained by appeal to some inherent sameness or similarity between distinct things: "having that by which they're the same." In the context of the Canons, the phrasing of this explanation (*you yi tong* 有以同) implies a preexisting similarity. The natural reading of the text is not that there is something by which we can agree *to deem* or *take* things to be the same, but that there is something by which they inherently *are* the same.[13] This interpretation is supported by the contrasting phrase in A87, which explains objects of different kinds as simply lacking a sameness, not as lacking a basis by which they can be deemed the same. The phrasing in A86–A87 thus seems better explained by a realist interpretation than by a conventionalist interpretation on which kinds are constituted by human agreement.

Stephens construes A86 differently and so has a contrary view about its implications for realism about kinds. He agrees that the similarities between things by which they form kinds are not a product of convention. But he assumes that kinds are distinct from similarities. On his reading, A86 implies that "when two objects have some respect in which we can see that they are similar, it seems as though *we can group them* as being of a kind" (Stephens 2017: 525, my italics). However, A86 says nothing about kinds being formed by our grouping similar things together. It says simply that things *are* the same kind when they have a respect in which they are the same. Stephens here appears to impose conventionalism about the existence of kinds onto the text. His implicit picture seems to be that kinds are constituted by our applying names to objects that share some similarity and thereby grouping them together. He says, "A kind (*lei* 類) name is *a name that can be used to group an object with some others* and differentiate that object from some others on the basis of the objects being grouped and differentiated having or lacking a particular similarity" (Stephens 2017: 525, my italics). As the italicized phrase indicates, this statement appears to conflate ontological and semantic matters that the Mohists keep distinct. For the Mohists, ontologically, a kind

[12] For the Chinese text, see Hung 1956b: 44/36–37. I follow Sun in reading 具 here as equivalent to the 俱 of A86 (Wu 1993: 618).

[13] The Canons seem not to use *tong* putatively, so it would be difficult to justify construing the text as referring to grounds by which one could deem or treat things the same. This point is supported by the contrasting phrase in A87, *bu you tong* 不有同, which grammatically cannot be read putatively. The use of *yi* 以 here dovetails with that in canon A73, where it refers to the feature or basis that distinguishes something as *shi* 是 (an object of a certain kind) rather than *fei* 非 (not that kind).

is a group of objects that share an inherent similarity, as A86 expressly indicates. Semantically, a kind name is a name that refers to the members of a kind. Nothing in the text implies that the use of kind names is what groups things into kinds.

For the Mohists, what is it for distinct things to have "that by which they're the same," if this sameness is not due to identity or to some extrinsic relation? Two passages in the "Greater Selection" provide hints. One contrasts names applied on the basis of a "uniting" relation—"residence or movement"—with things named on the basis of "shape or features" (*xing mao* 形貌) (Hung 1956b: 44/33–36). Things originating from Qin, for example, could be called "Qin items" by virtue of how they relate to Qin.[14] We can know that something is a Qin item—because we know it comes from Qin—without knowing what the thing is (perhaps it is an unfamiliar gadget manufactured in Qin). Conversely, we can also know what some Qin item is without knowing whether a particular example is a Qin item (we can know what Qin horses are without knowing whether a particular horse we see is a Qin horse). By contrast, since horses are named on the basis of their observable features, to qualify as knowing what horses are, we must know that any particular horse we see is indeed a horse.

The other passage indicates that things that are the same in being parts of the same whole need not share any features (*mao*). A person's fingers and head are parts of her body, but their features are unalike. Nevertheless, the various parts of one's body are the person (Hung 1956b: 44/46–49).

The passages thus contrast cases in which things take the same name by virtue of a "uniting" relation or by being parts of a whole with cases in which they share the same shape or features. (For brevity, I will abbreviate "shape or features" as just "features.") Hence a promising hypothesis—due to Robins—is that "having that by which they're the same" refers to things having some sameness in their intrinsic features, denoted by the term *mao* 貌 (Robins 2012: 372–373). This hypothesis coheres well with a widely shared interpretation of the Mohists' basic framework for distinguishing whether a thing belongs to a kind and so takes the name for that kind. The Mohists propose that such distinction-drawing be guided by comparing the thing to a model or measurement standard (*fa* 法) to see whether the two are similar. If something is similar to a model (*fa*), that thing is "so"—that is, it counts as the kind in question and takes the relevant name (A70).[15] According to canon A71, which seems to form a pair with A70, something is "so" when its features (*mao*) are similar to the model.[16] For example, we might evaluate whether an animal is a horse by comparing its features to those of another horse or of a picture of a horse. We might evaluate whether a piece of wood is square by measuring its features with a set square. It seems, then, that for things to be "the same in being the same kind" is for them to have some

[14] The text implies that to count as a Qin item, a thing must be located in Qin. For convenience of exposition, I am modifying the example so that a Qin item is something originating from Qin.

[15] "A model is what, things being like it, they are so 法，所若而然也" (A70).

[16] "Being so is the features being like the model 然也者，貌若法也" (A71). I follow Graham in reading 民 in A71 as a graphic error for a variant of *mao* 貌 (Graham 1978: 195).

intrinsic, non-relational feature or features—their *mao* or part thereof—that are inherently the same.[17]

The theoretical role of *mao* sharpens the contrast between sameness in being the same kind and sameness in being parts of a whole or being united together in a relation. It implies that because models (*fa*) exemplify or measure intrinsic features (*mao*) of things, their function is specifically to distinguish things that are the same in being the same kind. By contrast, comparison with a model does not guide the use of names associated with a "uniting" relation. A model is of no help in evaluating whether a particular horse is from Qin, for example, because being from Qin is not an observable, intrinsic feature of the horse. Nor are models relevant to part-whole relations. Comparison with a model cannot tell us whether a finger and a head are parts of the same person (compare Robins 2012: 373).

The use of models also epitomizes a crucial characteristic of names for kinds: how their use in a limited number of examples projects to other members of the kind. The Mohists refer to this characteristic of kind names metaphorically as "proceeding" (*xing* 行), by contrast with "stopping" (*zhi* 止).[18] Proper names or singular terms, such as "Jack," they point out, "stop" in one object, the bearer of the name (A78). Names for kinds "proceed" to all members of the kind. What allows kind names to "proceed" in this way is the observable sameness in the intrinsic features (*mao*) of members of the kind. A model (*fa*) for a kind exemplifies the relevant features, giving us an analogical basis for "proceeding" to distinguish and name other members of the kind. Models do not work this way for names based on sameness in part-whole or uniting relations. For example, having been shown pictures of a person N's finger and head and told they are parts of her body, we cannot then "proceed" to identify and apply the name "N" to pictures of other parts of N's body that we pick out from a collection of photos of various people's body parts. Having been shown one Qin horse, we cannot on that basis go on to identify and apply the name "Qin" to the other Qin horses in the herd or the other Qin animals on the farm.

For the Mohists, whether a name can be projected in this way is pivotal to determining whether the name is indeed being used as a kind name or as another sort of name, such as a proper name, family name, or metaphorical description (Robins 2012: 379–380). That kind names must "proceed" gives the Mohists grounds for rejecting strong constructivism. This point is implied by canon B72, which considers the thesis that things simply are whatever we call them. According to B72, if the name we use of something is not actually its name, then it's "impermissible" to consider the thing to be just what we call it. ("Impermissible" is the Mohist term for a usage or assertion that violates semantic or logical norms.) A speaker can call a dog "crane," but only if both speaker and audience understand that the name "crane" is being "borrowed" to refer to something that isn't a crane. According to canon B8, such cases are analogous to a family being surnamed

[17] In classical Chinese, *mao* normally refers specifically to visible features, but as Robins suggests, the Mohists could be using it in a technical sense that covers other perceptible features as well (Robins 2012: 372).

[18] For a concise explanation of this technical use of *xing*, see Robins 2010: 266–268.

"Crane"; the use as a surname does not imply that the members of the Crane family are actually birds. But suppose the speaker propounds the radical constructivist stance that a dog he calls "crane" is indeed a crane—that is, by being called "crane," the dog is now a member of the same kind as the birds normally referred to by "crane." This stance is impermissible, according to the Mohists, because accepting it would prevent the normal use of "crane" from "proceeding." "One making assertions mustn't take things to be whatever he calls them," the explanation to B72 states. "If he nevertheless takes it to be whatever he calls it [the "borrowed" use], then my calling [the normal use] does not proceed."[19] If anything can be deemed a member of the kind denoted by some name, then the name no longer applies specifically to things with certain similar features. The name can then no longer "proceed" to further members of the purported kind, since no specific features would distinguish them from non-members. The name would cease to function as a kind name. Insisting that things just are whatever we call them would leave us unable to apply kind names at all.

An implicit premise of the treatment in B72 is that "crane" normally refers only to cranes and not, for example, to dogs. But suppose the speaker who claims that things just are what we call them proposes to revise how "crane" is used, so that the name now refers to a new kind, one consisting of cranes and dogs. Would it then be "permissible" to claim that dogs are cranes?

If our reconstruction of the later Mohist conception of kinds is justified, the answer is no. As we have seen, the Mohists implicitly place several constraints on what can constitute a kind, which exclude "strange kinds" such as *cranes-and-dogs*. Kinds are constituted by things that share an inherent sameness in their observable intrinsic features (*mao*). The relevant features must allow the name of the kind to "proceed" to all and only examples of the kind. Cranes and dogs probably share no intrinsic features that distinguish all and only cranes and dogs from other animals. So the requirement that names for kinds must "proceed" on the basis of intrinsic features to all and only members of the kind excludes arbitrary groupings such as cranes and dogs. Cranes and dogs could jointly be members of a kind of wider scope, such as *animals*, but any such kind would likely include other creatures as well.

As we have reconstructed it, then, the later Mohist conception of a kind excludes arbitrary groupings of things, such as cranes and dogs, from constituting a kind. It also excludes things grouped together because they are "the same" in being parts of the same whole or "the same" by virtue of an extrinsic "uniting" relation such as sharing a location. The distinction between sameness in being the same kind and sameness in "uniting" further implies that things united together because of their role in human activity do not form kinds. For example, oxen and horses do not constitute a kind by virtue of both being draft animals. They can be grouped together and named "draft animals," but this is a case of sameness in "uniting," not sameness in being the same kind.

[19] 謂者毋惟乎其謂。彼猶惟乎其謂，則吾謂不行。

This conception of a kind may be narrower than the typical use of the word "kind" (*lei*) in classical Chinese, since the word is commonly used broadly to refer to any grouping of things based on similarity or analogy. Elsewhere in the *Mozi*, for instance, "kind" (*lei*) is used to refer to different kinds of warfare—punitive wars versus wars of aggression—and the later Mohist "Lesser Selection" uses it to refer to different kinds of linguistic expressions and logical relations (Hung 1956: 19/32, 45/10). Even in such cases, however, perhaps the Mohists could claim that things related as a kind share intrinsic features. (To support this claim, they would probably need to expand or supplement their conception of intrinsic features to include things such as ways of acting and grammatical structure.) Some previous discussions of the Canons have construed kinds broadly, such that a kind (*lei*) is any group of things sharing any similarity.[20] Nearly all general terms would then refer to kinds. This broader interpretation is not without justification, because considered on their own, canons A86–A87 are vague about exactly what sameness constitutes a kind, and because A78, which introduces the notion of a kind name, seems to imply that most general terms are names for kinds.

Canon A78 presents a three-way classification of names: personal names, or proper nouns, such as "Jack," which "stop" in only one thing; all-reaching names, such as "thing" or "object," which apply to everything; and kind names, such as "horse," which apply to all things that are similar in some way. Of names for kinds, the text says "Naming them 'horse' is [a] kind [name]. For what is similar to the object, one must use this name."[21] This threefold classification might be taken to imply that any general term which is not an "all-reaching" name is thereby a kind name. But this implication contradicts the fragment in the "Greater Selection" that distinguishes identity, uniting together, part-whole, and being of a kind as four distinct ways in which things can be "the same in taking the same name 同名之同" (Hung 1956b: 44/36–37). The latter, four-way classification is probably more informative about the Mohists' position, because it corresponds exactly to the four types of sameness in A86–A87. The discrepancy between the four-way account and A78 is easy to explain, however, if we simply drop the assumption that A78 presents an exhaustive classification of types of names. We can instead take it to treat only three especially prominent, contrasting types of names.[22]

[20] Hansen reads it this way and takes the other three types of sameness in A86 to count as sameness in being the same kind (Hansen 1983: 117). Fraser treats "uniting" criteria, such as location, as distinguishing kinds and asks whether, according to A86, "any group of things with anything in common could be considered a kind" (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1).

[21] 命之馬，類也。若實也者，必以是名也。The interpretation here disregards Graham's proposal that 也者 indicates quotation (Graham 1978: 140–141). Quotation in the Canons is indicated by 曰.

[22] Another possibility is that A86 represents an elaboration of the Mohist theory. The later Mohist texts are more like a notebook than a polished, systematic treatise. We should not be surprised to find minor discrepancies or developments between canons, as when B8 claims that "borrowing" a name to refer to an object not part of its extension inevitably leads to contradiction, while B72 appears to indicate under what circumstances such "borrowing" could be acceptable.

As in A86–A87, the phrasing in A78 seems better explained by a realist interpretation than by a conventionalist one. The canon presents a picture on which we dub one or more exemplars of some kind by a name, such as "horse," and by so doing commit to applying the same name to all relevantly similar objects. The dubbing is explicitly conventional, but the exemplar is treated as antecedently a member of the kind. The similarity between the exemplar(s) and the other objects we must now name "horse" is treated as holding independently of our naming them or deeming them similar. The text refers to "similar objects" (*ruo shi* 若實), not to objects speakers *take* to be similar. The simplest, most direct explanation of this phrasing is that the relevant similarities obtain antecedently and are not the product of convention. Were the Mohists conventionalists about kinds, we might expect the text to indicate that the similarity relation by which different individuals each take the name "horse" is formed through agreement, convention, or practice, but it does not.

To sum up, according to the Canons and the "Greater Selection," a kind is constituted by a group of discrete objects that are the same in some of their intrinsic features, such that a name for such objects is projectible, by reference to models or measurement tools, to further members of the kind on the basis of observable features. Since a kind just is a group of things with the same intrinsic features, the question of whether the later Mohists are better interpreted as realists or conventionalists about kinds is a question about how they understand the relevant sameness. If it is fixed by the world independently of human agreement—that is, if the members of a kind are inherently the same in some respect, regardless of whether we deem them the same or group them together as a kind—then kinds are constituted by the world, not by convention.[23] As we saw, the phrasing of both A86–A87 and A78 suggests that the Mohists indeed treat the relevant sameness as inherent in how things are, not in how we agree they are or take them to be.

Beyond these points, a consequence of the projectibility constraint that emerged from our discussion of B72 is that groupings of things on the basis of conventionally determined similarities may fail to constitute kinds. Conventions cannot ensure that members of some purported kind indeed share an intrinsic similarity by which the kind name "proceeds" to all and only its members. The contrast with the "uniting" relation, which clearly can be conventional, again suggests that whether some kind relation exists depends on features of reality, not conventional agreement.[24]

2. Realism about Kinds, Conventionalism about Reference

This account of the Mohists' conception of kinds in hand, I now want to consider their account of how the reference of kind names is

[23] If the objects in question are human artifacts, then the existence of the objects of course depends on our activity, but the shared features that make them a kind will be intrinsic to them.

[24] Some "uniting" relations, such as being a Qin object or being a citizen of a particular political society, are probably wholly conventional. Others, such as biological parent-child relations, are determined independently of convention. Similarly, names based on part-whole relations could involve both natural and conventional part-whole relations.

determined—that is, what settles which similar things we are talking about when we use a kind name.

Canon A78 presents the Mohists' basic picture. We fix the reference of a kind name ostensively, by dubbing one or more exemplars with the name—such as "horse"—and then "proceeding" to apply it to other members of the kind. The name refers to all objects with features like the exemplar.

What determines what kind the exemplar is an exemplar of? Suppose the exemplar is a horse. A horse is a member of multiple kinds—*horse*, *quadruped*, *mammal*, *living creature*, and so forth. In presenting a horse as an exemplar, how do we determine whether the kind we are referring to is *horse* or another kind to which horses belong?

The procedure the Canons sketch for answering this question is that, working from models or exemplars, we pick out aspects of the object to serve as criteria and then identify features of those aspects that hold of all members of the kind. In the case of horses, the aspects might be the shape, hair, legs, and tail; the features might be an equine body shape, a mane, single hooves, and a skirted tail. Guided by similarities in these features, the speech community converges on norms for using "horse" that reliably distinguish horses from other animals. Conventional practices thus settle that "horse" refers to animals of the kind *horse*.

As canon B2 points out, kinds can overlap and be of narrower or wider scope, so the process of identifying them by working from exemplars may be fraught with difficulty.[25] Some features of an exemplar may not extend to all members of the kind; a bird is an exemplar of a living creature, but not all living creatures have wings. Conversely, a speech community's norms for distinguishing the kind denoted by some term might actually pick out a kind of broader scope than intended. Perhaps norms that serve well enough in distinguishing horses from other domesticated animals fail to distinguish horses from zebras. On encountering their first zebra, the speech community would then be free to determine by convention whether their word "horse" actually refers to the kind *equine*, not *horse*, or to reexamine their exemplars and refine the features by which they identify horses.

The Mohists address the issue of fixing the reference of terms for kinds in a series of canons on disputation. The issue is pertinent because the two sides in a disputation may be unable to evaluate each other's assertions unless they can identify what kind each side is talking about. For our purposes, how the Mohists treat this point may be informative as to how they understand the status of kind relations. If they are similarity realists, they may approach the issue as a matter of picking out a group of objects that are antecedently related by sharing the same intrinsic features. If they are conventionalists about the ontology of kinds, they may treat the issue as a matter of establishing conventions about what objects will count as relevantly similar.

The Mohists understand "disputation" (*bian* 辯)—dialectics or debate—as an agonistic activity in which two sides contend over whether something is "this" (*shi* 是) or "not" (*fei* 非) with respect to a term for some kind. For example, one side might declare a particular animal "ox," while the

[25] The canon calls this problem "the difficulty of extending kinds 推類之難." Because of textual problems and obscurities in B2, I will not quote the canon in full.

other declares it "non-ox" (A74). In a well-formed disputation, the two terms asserted must be contradictories, so that logically one and only one of them will "fit" (*dang* 當) the object (B35). To determine whether a term fits an object, we can compare the object to a model or exemplar (*fa* 法) of the kind denoted by the term to check whether their features are similar.

Canons A93–B2 form a series giving detailed practical advice for how to proceed in disputation, such as what to do in cases when the object in question is partly different from the model (A96) versus those in which it is completely the same (A95).[26] The text offers practical hints such as to observe any "devious turns" the opponent might make (A95), in which case we are to seek the reason or the model that grounds the opponent's unexpected assertion (A94).

A pair of canons in this series—A97 and B1—address how to identify the features of an object by which an opponent distinguishes whether it is "so" or not—and thus is a member of some kind, taking some name—and how to settle which kind the opponent takes the object to exemplify. A97 explains that when opponents declare that some object is "so," with respect to some kind and name, we should seek to distinguish the norm they are following by settling the "basis" or "criterion" (*yin* 因) by which to judge things "so" or not.

> A97
> 經：止因，以別道。
> 經說：止。[27] 彼舉然者以為此其然也，則舉不然者而問之。……
> Canon: Settle the basis in order to separate ways.
> Explanation: (Settle.) If the other cites what is so as grounds for taking this one to be so, then cite what is not so and ask about it….

Suppose the opponent cites the equine body shape and single hooves of some particular animal as grounds for asserting it is a horse. To "settle the basis" by which the opponent distinguishes horses from non-horses, the text prompts us to ask about things that are not "so." Are animals with a different shape or different feet, such as dogs or cattle, also horses? Is a horse of a different color also a horse? The "basis" by which to distinguish whether something is "so" is the aspect or aspects that must be "so." In the case of kinds, the "basis" will be the aspects we observe to check for the characteristic features (*mao*) that mark the kind. As suggested above, if we are distinguishing horses from non-horses, the "basis" might be the body, hair, tail, and hooves; the features might be an equine body shape, a mane, a skirted tail, and single hooves. If we are distinguishing black horses from other colors, the "basis" might be body hair, and we might ask whether a different-colored mane affects whether the horse counts as black or not.

[26] An example of the latter sort of case might be when the corner of a square table aligns perfectly with a set square. An example of the former might be when we consider whether a horse with black hair and a blonde mane should count as a black horse, given that our exemplar is a black horse with a black mane.

[27] Emending 心 to 止, as corrected from the canon.

Canon A97 treats how we judge whether a particular object is "so" with respect to some kind and its name. But the opponent could be distinguishing the kind or using the name differently from us. So canon B1 next addresses the issue of pinning down which kind the opponent takes the object to exemplify. To go along with the opponent in "proceeding" to identify members of some kind, we must settle what kind he is referring to. To do so, we prompt him to explain what is "the same" or "so" of all members of the kind in question.

> B1
> 經：止類，以行人。說在同。
> 經說：止。彼以此其然也說是其然也。我以此其不然也疑是其然也。
> Canon: Settle the kind in order to let others proceed. Explained by: sameness.
> Explanation: (Settle.) The other takes something being so of this one as grounds for explaining that this kind is so. I take something being not so of this one as grounds for doubting this kind is so.

The two sides consider in turn whether the presence or absence of various features in an individual exemplar ("this one") generalizes to the entire kind of which the individual is a member ("this kind"). The aim is to settle exactly what kind the opponent is referring to by identifying what features hold of all members of the kind. The opponent explains that a certain feature of the exemplar is the same for the entire kind; conversely, our side queries whether the absence of some feature in the exemplar extends to the entire kind. Perhaps the exemplar is a black horse, and the opponent proposes to take it as an example of the kind *horse*, which he names "horse." The opponent cites one or more features that are "so" of the horse—body shape, mane, skirted tail, single hooves—as features that are "so" of the kind. Our side might ask about the horse's lacking various features—horns, cleft hooves, a long bony tail, and so forth—to confirm whether the kind as a whole lacks these.

Stephens contends that how we construe B1 is pivotal to whether we adopt a realist or conventionalist interpretation of the Mohist view of kinds. In his view, the canon's description of a process of "settling" or "fixing" (*zhi* 止) a kind by specifying characteristic features makes it plausible that the Mohists could be conventionalists about kinds, because agreement between the two disputers is what "determines how that fixing should take place" (Stephens 2017: 529). He appears to construe "settling" or "fixing" the kind as a matter of stipulating what objects will be grouped together as "the same" and thus constitute a kind.

To evaluate this suggestion appropriately, we again need to distinguish semantic from ontological issues. The canon is consistent with what we can call "semantic conventionalism" about names for kinds, the view that which kinds we refer to and what names we use to do so are determined by speakers' agreement. To return to the horse example, the canon can plausibly be construed as illustrating a discursive process by which two parties might reach agreement that the kind they are referring to is indeed *horse*, not *black*

animal or *quadruped*. They can then agree to call this kind "horse," "*ma* 馬," or another name. However, our concern here is with the ontological, not semantic, implications of the canon. By agreeing that they are referring to horses and not to some other kind, are the two sides identifying an existent kind, constituted by objects that inherently are "the same" in sharing certain intrinsic features? Or are they forming a convention that establishes a kind by stipulating what objects will count as "the same"?

At least four reasons support the former, realist interpretation. First, in its context, the topic of the canon is how to determine what kind an interlocutor is referring to, not how to specify what kind relations exist. Canons B1 and A97 represent steps one might take in disputation when we suspect an opponent is using names differently from us or has made a "devious turn" away from some familiar or expected way of using names. The task is to appeal to an exemplar to confirm what kind the opponent is talking about, not to group certain objects together and deem them "the same" and thus the same kind. In the scenario depicted, the opponent cites a feature of an exemplar to explain that he is referring to the kind comprising all things that are the same as the exemplar in having that feature.

Second, the text does not allude to reaching agreement about what constitutes "sameness in being the same kind." It says nothing about deeming two things or all things with some feature to be the same; nor does it mention agreeing on what counts as "so" or "the same" with respect to some feature. The phrasing of the explanation refers to using an exemplar to illustrate features shared by all members of a kind, not to stipulating what objects will count as similar and thus constitute a kind.

Third, A97 uses the word *zhi* 止 ("settle," "fix") to refer to identifying, from among various aspects of an object, the aspect that is relevant to distinguishing some kind and applying some name. By parallelism, in B1, *zhi* should refer to identifying, from among the various kinds the opponent might be referring to, the kind that is relevant to the discussion. Any particular horse belongs to various kinds—*horse*, *quadruped*, *mammal*, and so on. The point is to settle which of these the opponent is talking about, not to settle on a convention about what constitutes a kind.

Fourth, the phrasing indicates that a kind relation obtains antecedently between the exemplar at hand and the kind it belongs to. The text refers to the exemplar as "this (one here)" (*ci* 此) and to its kind as "this (kind)" (*shi* 是). The exemplar is treated as a basis for making generalizations about its kind, thus implying that the kind relation already exists—the exemplar is antecedently a member of the kind. The next canon, B2, underscores this point, remarking on the difficulty of generalizing from what is "so" of an exemplar, "this (one here)" (*ci*), to what is "so" of some kind to which it belongs, "this (kind)" (*shi*).

I conclude that taking the Mohists to be ontological realists about kinds, rather than conventionalists, explains B1 more simply and fully and coheres better with A86–A87. The Mohists are probably semantic conventionalists—that is, conventionalists about which kind some name refers to—but they are realists about what kinds exist.

A further canon, B66, helps to fill out the Mohist picture of kinds. Although the scenario it presents is somewhat different from that of B1,

canon B66 depicts what amounts to a breakdown in the process of "settling the kind." Instead of two opponents citing features to settle what kind they are discussing, here we are considering what features to cite in distinguishing two kinds. B66 warns that to correctly identify different kinds, we must cite intrinsic features shared by all and only members of the kind. If we "wildly" cite features that objects of two kinds share or that not all objects of one kind have, we will fail to identify the differences between kinds properly.

> B66
>
> 經：狂舉不可以知異。說在有。
>
> 經說：狂。[28] 牛與馬惟異[29]，以牛有齒馬有尾說牛之非馬也不可。是俱有，不偏有偏無有。曰，牛[30] 與馬不類，用牛角，馬無角，是類不同也。若舉牛有角，馬無角，以是為類之不同也，是狂舉也，猶牛有齒馬有尾。
>
> Canon: By "wild" citing, one cannot know differences. Explained by: having.
>
> Explanation: (Wild.) Although oxen and horses are different, it is impermissible to use oxen having teeth and horses having tails to explain [how] oxen are not horses. These they both have; it's not that one side has them and one side lacks them. To say, "Oxen and horses are not of a kind," and appeal to oxen having horns and horses lacking horns, in this the kinds are not the same. If you cite oxen having horns and horses lacking horns, and take this to be [how] the kinds are not the same, this is "wild" citing, like oxen having teeth and horses having tails.

The text appears to take the realist stance that a preexisting difference obtains between the kinds *oxen* and *horses*, which we are to mark by citing the right features. Since oxen and horses both have teeth and tails, we cannot cite these to identify the difference between them. Nor can we cite the presence or absence of horns. Although only oxen have horns, not all oxen have them (or at least not all cattle do). To "know" the difference between the two kinds, we must cite features that differentiate *all* their members.

Stephens disagrees that B66 has realist implications, proposing instead that its significance is purely formal, not substantive (Stephens 2017: 534). In his view, the point is merely that to mark differences between kinds, we must employ features possessed by all and only things on one side of the distinction. This point holds regardless of whether the differences in question are determined on realist or conventionalist grounds. As he sees it, the issue is not that citing features "wildly" "fail[s] to distinguish in the correct way, but rather…[that] it fails to distinguish at all" (Stephens 2017: 534).

One problem with this proposal is that one of the examples of citing "wildly" does succeed in drawing a distinction, that between horned and hornless members of the aggregate oxen-and-horses. Part of the text's point is

[28] Transposing 牛 and 狂 in order to restore the heading of the explanation.
[29] Reading 惟 as 雖.
[30] Emending 之 to 牛 on grounds of graphic error.

that this distinction fails to capture the *correct* difference. The Mohists would deny that hornless oxen together with hornless horses (that is, all horses) constitute a kind, because there are no intrinsic features that all and only hornless oxen and horses share. If we take lacking horns to be a distinguishing feature, for example, the kind will include other hornless animals, such as dogs. If other hornless animals are excluded, then hornless oxen and horses can be "the same in uniting together" but not "the same in being the same kind."[31] According to the Mohist view of kinds, in this context reality indeed fixes a unique way to divide objects into kinds.[32]

More important, if the Mohists were conventionalists about the ontology of kinds, the issue B66 treats would probably not be framed as it is. If the Mohists were conventionalists, the point of B66 would be to present a constraint on how to stipulate the features of proposed kinds. In fact, however, the phrasing implies that the issue is how to correctly recognize preexisting differences between kinds. If the text were expressing a conventionalist stance, we would expect it to refer to defining or establishing differences, not to "knowing" them. Moreover, the problem of failing to know differences would not arise, because the relevant differences would be stipulated by convention. A speech community would be free to group oxen and horses together as one kind or to stipulate that the relevant difference is horned versus hornless animals. What makes these criteria "wild" is that they fail to align with what the text implies is the actual, preexisting difference between oxen and horses.

3. Ontology Versus Semantics

Having clarified what I take the realist stance of the Canons to be—similarity realism—I will now argue for two interrelated sets of claims. First, Stephens's own interpretation is committed to similarity realism, and what he calls "context-realism" and "objective-answer-realism," along with the ontological half of "kind-realism," are simply descriptions of different implications of similarity realism. Second, what Stephens calls "kind-conventionalism" is not an ontological view about kinds at all but a semantic view about how the reference of names for kinds is fixed. This semantic view is consistent with similarity realism, not a rival to it, and indeed Hansen and Fraser probably share the same interpretation.

Stephens takes the Canons to be committed to what he calls "context-realism" and "objective-answer-realism." Rather than two distinct

[31] Stephens suggests that the Mohists would see nothing improper about setting aside the distinction between oxen and horses and instead grouping hornless oxen together with horses as a kind (Stephens 2017: 535). The account of kinds presented in section 1 entails that they would indeed reject such an alternative distinction.

[32] Working without the constraints on kinds developed in section 1, Fraser finds a theoretical tension between the apparently loose conception of kinds in A86 and the constraints implied by the notion of "wild" citing in B66 (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1). Stephens suggests that resolving the purported tension is an advantage of a conventionalist interpretation (Stephens 2017: 539). The realist interpretation presented here eliminates this tension, since it shows how the requirement that members of a kind share intrinsic features explains the stance of B66.

types of realism, these appear to be simply two descriptions of the consequences of similarity realism. "Context-realism" is introduced as the very weak thesis that "our naming practices happen within the context of a real, mind-independent world" (Stephens 2017: 521–522). But Stephens then expands this thesis into a considerably stronger position:

> [The Later Mohists] are context-realists…[who] believe that our naming happens in the context of a real world in which there are observable similarities and differences that are independent of human cognitive or social activity. When we say that one object is similar to another in some way and therefore can be picked out by a name denoting a similar kind, we are responding to the actual pattern of similarities and differences in the world. (Stephens 2017: 529)

This statement appears to correspond to what I have been calling similarity realism. It affirms that for the Canons the similarities and differences that determine what things can be related as kinds are features of the world that obtain independently of human judgment.

"Objective-answer-realism" Stephens characterizes as holding that "the mind-independent world…plays the deciding role in whether or not something counts as an X" and thus determines an objective answer to whether some name for X fits some object (Stephens 2017: 522, 522 n1). In disputation, for example, once we have specified the relevant similarity between the object under discussion and the model for some kind term, such as "ox," "who wins the dispute is determined by the reality of the thing in front of us and whether or not it shares that relevant similarity" (Stephens 2017: 529). Although Stephens does not explain the relation between them, from these remarks it seems that "objective-answer-realism" is not a distinct view from "context-realism" but simply an application of it to the question of whether some kind term applies to some object.

Given the later Mohist conception of a kind, "context-realism," as Stephens presents it, is committed to realism about what kinds exist, in the sense that the world determines, independently of human activity, what things stand in the "sameness" relations that constitute kinds. As we saw from A86–A87, for a group of objects to constitute a kind just is for them to share intrinsic features that are "the same." Kinds are formed by inherent similarities between things. Stephens affirms, along with Hansen and Fraser, that for the later Mohists such similarities are determined by the world, not by human convention. Hence all sides agree that reality determines what kinds exist and what objects are members of those kinds. For the Mohists, the explanation of why, as Stephens says, there is an objective answer to the question of whether some particular animal is an ox is that reality determines that the kind *ox* exists and that certain animals share intrinsic features that make them members of that kind.

A consequence of this realist view of similarities is that reality fixes the range or universe of kinds available to be recognized and constrains what can or cannot constitute a kind. Again, Stephens agrees, as he says that for the later Mohists, "the actual pattern of similarities and differences in the world…determine[s] what patterns of kind-names are ultimately possible"

(Stephens 2017: 529). As we saw in section 1, for the later Mohists, some groupings of things do not form kinds, even if some speech community adopts a convention that they do. Things that are the same in being parts of the same whole do not thereby constitute a kind. Nor do things that are the same in being "united together." Purported kinds can fail to qualify as actual kinds if their members do not share similar intrinsic features that allow the kind name to "proceed" to all and only its members. For this reason, "strange kinds" such as *cranes-and-dogs* fail to be kinds.

Stephens distinguishes the similarity realism we have characterized so far from what he calls "kind-realism." As I noted in the Introduction, he defines "kind-realism" in two distinct, non-equivalent ways, one referring to ontology, one to semantics. "Kind-realism" combines the ontological claim that "there is some correct or privileged set of kinds" with the semantic claim that "there is some correct scheme of kind-terms" (Stephens 2017: 522, 521). As we have just seen, according to "context-realism," reality determines what kinds exist, because it determines what similarities obtain between things. So on Stephens's own interpretation, there is a straightforward sense in which for the Canons there is indeed "some correct or privileged set of kinds," namely the set of kinds fixed by reality. "Context-realism" commits us to similarity realism and thus to ontological realism about kinds.

Given that he rejects "kind-realism," however, presumably the set of all kinds fixed by reality is not what Stephens means by a "privileged set of kinds." His concern is whether, within the range of kind relations that exist, there is some unique proper subset of kinds that are privileged in the sense that it is correct for a speech community to identify and name just those and no others. The question he raises is:

> …whether, within the range of ways of dividing things into kinds still left possible by the [Later Mohists'] similarities-and-differences approach, we should attribute to them the claim that there is some correct way of doing so…there are any of a number of ways of separating things into kinds based on similarities and differences….[T]here is no way of moving between object and name without our deciding to fix the criterion and the kind. (Stephens 2017: 529)

As his remark about moving from object to name indicates, Stephens here tacitly changes the subject from ontology to semantics. The issue he is addressing is not whether reality determines what kinds exist or which objects are members of those kinds. It is whether reality determines what kinds we must *name*—what reference relations must exist between groups of similar objects and the kind names speakers employ. His "privileged set of kinds" is actually a privileged lexicon of names for certain kinds and not others. The semantic side of "kind-realism," which he rightly rejects, is the view that reality in itself, independently of human activity, determines which kinds it is correct to introduce names for. According to semantic "kind-realism," a speech community might somehow be wrong to conventionally agree to introduce names for unorthodox kinds—*horned quadrupeds* or *hornless mammals*, for example—while passing over names for familiar kinds such as

oxen or horses. Reality dictates a list of "slots" for general terms that specify the "correct" kinds that any acceptable lexicon of kind names must refer to.

Semantic "kind-realism" is wildly implausible. As Stephens rightly says, the only way to establish a referential relation between the group of similar objects that constitute some kind and a name for the kind is by speakers converging, in communicative practice, on criteria by which they will identify the similarity in question and thus the kind they are referring to. Different speech communities are free to establish different reference relations, introducing names for different kinds and ignoring kinds they find irrelevant to their interests. The idea that there is some privileged set of norms by which a speech community must refer to just some kinds and not others is untenable.

What Stephens calls "kind-conventionalism" explicitly concerns semantics, not ontology, for he characterizes it as a view about terms, not kinds: "schemes of kind terms [are] determined by conventional decisions that occur during disputation" (Stephens 2017: 521).[33] Applied to the Canons, this characterization is too narrow. There is no reason to think the Mohists see kind terms and their reference as determined only during disputation or only through explicit decisions. But if we construe "conventionalism" more broadly—as meaning roughly "determined through social practices"—then canons such as A78, A97, and B1 seem best explained by a pragmatic, conventionalist view about how reference relations are established between kinds and kind names. Crucially, however, this semantic conventionalism concerns only how speakers pick out the kinds they talk about, not what constitutes those kinds. For the later Mohists, given the reference of kind names as established through conventional naming practices, reality determines what objects are indeed similar and thus of the same kind or not. Through its discursive practices, for example, a speech community may or may not introduce a name referring to horses. But, on the Mohist view, the similarity between individual horses by which they jointly constitute the kind *horse* exists either way. For the Mohists, semantic conventionalism goes hand in hand with similarity realism, or ontological realism about what kinds exist and what objects are members of those kinds.

Neither Hansen nor Fraser pairs semantic "kind-realism" with the similarity realism they attribute to the Canons. Stephens's contention that Fraser does is contradicted by a sentence he himself quotes in which Fraser straightforwardly disavows such a stance, saying that for the Mohists, "there is at least one—although *nothing in the text explicitly rules out there being more than one*—predetermined, correct scheme of kind distinctions" (Stephens 2017: 532; Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1, my italics). This remark appears to state an implication of similarity realism, not an endorsement of semantic "kind-realism." Fraser indicates that as he reads them, "the texts may also be compatible with a view that allows some latitude in our standards of judging

[33] This characterization is reinforced by the one canon Stephens cites in favor of a "kind-conventionalist" interpretation of the Mohists, B41 (Stephens 2017: 540). The canon concerns asking an interlocutor who uses an unknown name to specify its referent, which turns out to be a known object. The topic is reference, not ontology, and the canon seems irrelevant to the issue of what determines "sameness in being the same kind."

shi/fei, provided they rest on at least some objective basis for distinguishing similarities and differences" (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 1). This statement implies the conjunction of a conventionalist stance on reference with a realist stance on kind relations: speakers may adopt different standards for judging *shi* (this) or *fei* (not), and thus picking out kinds, but the standards must rest on an objective basis for distinguishing similarities. No doubt Fraser's discussion is flawed, particularly in characterizing the Mohist conception of a kind too loosely. But it focuses squarely on the ontological issue of how kind relations are determined, not the semantic issue of what fixes the reference of kind names. Hence it steers clear of the semantic "kind-realist" view Stephens criticizes.

Hansen expressly indicates that on his interpretation similarity relations are fixed by the human-independent world, while reference relations between names and kinds are fixed by conventional practices. As he puts it, "the Mohists embed their realistic theory in a pragmatic framework" (Hansen 1992: 241). According to his account of the Mohist theory, the reference of kind names is determined by our dubbing an example of the kind by some name and then making a pragmatic commitment to guide use of the name by similarity to the example or to relevant measurement standards (Hansen 1992: 241). Similarity relations existing independently of our practices then determine what does or does not belong to the kind. "What satisfies the name after we make a commitment to the example or measurement standard is an objective matter [that] depends on the world" (Hansen 1992: 244). Hansen's explicit interpretation thus combines conventionalism about reference with realism about kind relations, avoiding semantic "kind-realism."

Stephens attributes a semantic "kind-realist" interpretation to Hansen mainly on the grounds of the latter's remarks about whether there is a uniquely correct way to divide up a whole comprising oxen and horses as parts, an example introduced in canon B67 (Stephens 2017: 530). Hansen glosses the Mohist view by saying that, "there is *one* suitable way to break ox-horse into its parts," which represent "*nature-given* partitions" (Hansen 1992: 243, his italics). He criticizes the later Mohists for "never offer[ing] a general theory of which similarities and differences count when we are deciding where nature draws the lines between [parts]" (Hansen 1992: 243).

These remarks may seem to suggest that many similarities exist which could justifiably distinguish kinds, and nature fixes only some subset of these as the correct ones by which to "draw the lines" between kinds to name. Hansen may seem to be saying that nature rules out assigning oxen and horses to any kinds other than *oxen* and *horses*—we could not drop all reference to oxen and horses, for example, and instead partition the animals into *horned quadrupeds* versus *hornless quadrupeds*.

In the original context, however, these are probably not the claims Hansen is making. The paragraph in question begins by observing that we can *find* or *project* similarity in many ways (Hansen 1992: 242, my italics). This comment alludes to views such as strong constructivism or Xunzian conventionalism. Hansen's point is then that, for the Mohists, among the various respects in which people might *take* things to be similar, nature determines that only some are *actually* similar such that they form a kind. This is an expression of similarity realism. He asserts that, for the Mohists,

"ox-horse"—the whole formed by oxen and horses—divides only into the parts *oxen* and *horses*. The Mohists would probably agree, since if we are specifically considering the whole "ox-horse," this seems the only way of dividing the animals into kinds. As we saw in discussing B66, oxen and horses could be divided into other kinds, such as *horned quadrupeds* versus *hornless quadrupeds*, but these kinds include many other animals besides oxen and horses, so they are not specifically ways of partitioning "ox-horse."

Hansen faults the Mohists for lacking a satisfactory explanation of nature-given kind distinctions with which to rebut a constructivist or conventionalist. This frustration—shared by Fraser (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1)—arises partly from an overly broad construal of the Mohist conception of a kind. If sameness in being parts of a whole and sameness in being "united together" can also be grounds for kind distinctions, then it indeed seems that almost any group of things could be a kind, and the distinction between what does and does not constitute a kind becomes mysterious and potentially arbitrary. As we have seen, however, Robins's thesis that kinds share intrinsic features (*mao*) points the way to a more principled realist account that explains the distinction between kind relations and other, potentially conventional groups of things to which general terms may refer.

Conclusion

The later Mohists take a realist stance on the ontological issues of what kinds there are, what things are members of those kinds, and whether any two or more things are of the same kind. They take a conventionalist approach to the semantic issues of choosing what kind terms we use, fixing the reference of those terms, and thus, among the universe of kinds determined by the world, settling which ones we talk about.

To be sure, the Mohists endorse no "privileged set of kinds" insofar as nothing mandates that a speech community employ names for certain kinds and not others. What existent kinds a community dubs with a name will depend on conventions grounded in the community's values and interests. However, this commonsensical point is consistent with a realist view of the ontology of kinds, on which inherent similarities constitute kinds and fix the extensions of the names speakers give to kinds. For the Mohists, reality alone, not social conventions, determines whether a kind exists—that is, whether the relevant similarity relation obtains—and what its members are.

Previous studies have criticized the Mohists for lacking a systematic, principled explanation of how kind relations are determined (Fraser 2005/2015: sect. 6.1). The main contribution of the present work is to show that a more detailed interpretation of the Mohist conception of a kind yields a principled realist account of kind relations that distinguishes them from "uniting together" and part-whole relations, some of which may indeed be purely conventional. Mohist realism is still open to criticism, of course, as any form of metaphysical realism is. In particular, a critic could point out that the Mohists still provide no explanation of *why* some objects possess similar intrinsic features and some do not. The critic could also contend that, compared with Xunzian conventionalism, Mohist realism about kinds is explanatorily redundant. Such potential criticisms aside, the contrast the

Mohists introduce between sameness based on intrinsic features and sameness based on extrinsic relations seems a potentially informative metaphysical distinction.[34]

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