

Chinese philosophy has since its pre-Imperial beginnings been concerned with knowledge – witness Zhuangzi’s argument with Hui Shi about knowing about the happiness of the fish. Furthermore, as this famous story makes clear, there is argument about what people know and what they do not know. And there are things known, in this story, the happiness of the fish, more usually, the character of rulers, the rites, how to act, right and wrong, history, cosmology, the unifying principle of the world, medicine, and mathematics. Yet these aspects of the Chinese tradition have hardly received the attention they deserve from philosophers—questions of what can be known, what the concept of knowledge is taken to be, what role it plays within various conceptual frameworks, as well as the sceptical challenges made to knowledge, beginning, once again, with the Zhuangzi. Scepticism makes room for persuasion, and for clarifying what makes a sound argument, as opposed to mere persuasion. But there are also systematic collections of knowledge (mathematical, medical, cosmological, scientific, for example) which are prominent in the tradition, and they have close connections with philosophy proper.

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