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'Self-Refutation' (*bèi*) in Early Chinese Argumentative Prose: Sidelights on the Linguistic Prehistory of Incipient Philosophy[*]

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There seems to be an emerging consensus within the field of classics that the lexical field of 'philosophy', which is absent in the earliest Greek sources, originated in the 5th century BC with Pythagoras of Samos (*c.* 570-480 BC) and his followers, although formations from φιλοσοφ-(-ία, -εῖν, -ικός etc.) are only attested somewhat later.[1] From a colorful description in Cicero (106-43 BC), likely to harken back to much earlier Greek sources such as Heracleides Ponticus (*c.* 390-310 BC), we learn that the initial self-definition of Pythagoras as a philosopher was set against two negative prototypes of Greek contemporary culture: those who 'with their trained bodies strive for the glory and profit of the crown' in sports, and those who are 'attracted by the prospect of profitable purchase and sale' at the Olympic games.[2] In contradistinction to the athlete and the businessman, then, the philosopher is a rare person, striving for sagacity (*sapientiae studiosos*), 'in whose life the contemplation and exploration of things take a far more prominent place than anything else'.[3] Remarkably, Aristotle, who is viewed by some as the father of 'philosophy' in Greece, located the origins of those 'sciences which relate neither to pleasure nor yet to the necessities of life'[4] with the leisurely priestly class in Egypt, with whom Pythagoras is in turn said to have studied for many years.[5] The philosophers, characterised in other early Greek texts as itinerant, often ascetic people forming esoteric groups and interested in the open 'observation' (θεωρία) of the

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1   Cf. Malingrey, 'Philosophia'; Riedweg, *Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"*, pp. 147-181.

2   '.. *alii corporibus exercitatis gloriam et nobilitatem coronae peterent, alii emendi aut vendendi quaestu et lucro ducerentur.*' (Cicero, *Tusculanae* 5.8-9, see Riedweg, 'Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"', pp. 150-153 for a detailed discussion of the passage).

3   '.. *in vita longe omnibus studiis contemplationem rerum cognitionemque praestare*'; cited from Riedweg, 'Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"', pp. 152-153.

4   αἱ μὴ πρὸς ἡδονὴν μηδὲ πρὸς τἀναγκαῖα τῶν ἐπιστημῶν (Tredennick, trans., *Aristotle*, 1.981 b).

5   See Holenstein, 'Philosophie außerhalb Europas', pp. 65-77. Similar classical passages, which point to early Greek knowledge of Egyptian language and literature or mention an indebtedness to Egyptian science, are collected in Quack, 'Die Rolle der Hieroglyphen', pp. 86-90.

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nature of things in general to the exclusion of more mundane activities, are thus *not* defined as against the sages of earlier periods. Quite to the contrary, φιλόσοφος – originally an exocentric possessive compound before being reanalyzed as a verbal determinative compound between the 6th and the end of the 5th *c.* BC – was construed as a categorical continuation and, indeed, an 'elativic' enhancement of *prevailing* notions of sagacity.[6] Moreover, the philosopher's primary activity of θεωρέειν still echoed the religious activities of oracle divination and pilgrimages to sacral feastings during this period, held in communities such as the one of Pythagoras, who was revered as a '*guru*-like'[7] head of a sect, much occupied with rituals regulating sacrificial behavior and food consumption[8] apart from his more scientific preoccupations.

During the preceding archaic period, pronunciation of ἀλήθεια 'the state of being unconcealed or evident', was still the prerogative of the skilled epic singer, the seer, or the king, combining mantic functions with those of a judge – the three prototypical *maîtres de la vérité* of Marcel Detienne's study of the same title.[9] The term ἀλήθεια, often linked to the spirit of justice (δίκη) and revealed by the memory-preserving techniques of chanting, praise, and epiphanic visualization of these masters, is systematically opposed to oblivion (λήθη), not to deception and trickery (ἀπάτη, δόλος), and it is simply *asserted* without the need for argumentation, persuasion, let alone demonstration obeying certain pre-defined rational criteria. ἀλήθεια and λήθη thus complement each other, never mind ambiguities arising out of their pairing. Yet at the end of a long and complicated process of what Detienne calls 'laicization' and 'devaluation' of ἀλήθεια, essentially two camps emerge in sixth century Greece. On the one hand, the urban milieu of the sophists, who radically break with the religious tradition and reduce language to a tool, choosing from the complementary pair whatever is effective in political discourse; on the other, the religious-philosophical sects of the Pythagoreans, Orphics and others, living on the margins of the city, who successfully reinstantiate ἀλήθεια as an absolute, now diametrically opposed to the forces of oblivion, deception and trickery, but also to opinion (δόξα) and (per)suasion (πεῖσις).[10] Following Detienne, a dichotomy comes into the Greek world with this move, which

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6   Burkert, 'Platon oder Pythagoras?', pp. 172-173.

7   Riedweg, 'Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"', p. 173.

8   Riedweg, 'Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"', pp. 172-173.

9   Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque*, see on these roles especially chap. II and III.

10   Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque*, chap. V ('Le procès de laïcisation') and VI ('Le choix: Alétheia ou Apaté'), pp. 81-143.

replaces the logic of ambiguity with the logic of non-contradiction and paves the way for ἀλήθεια becoming an objectifiable 'truth' with Parmenides in the 5th century. While the sophists were ultimately responsible for '… la formulation d'un principe d'identité et de l'avènement d'une logique de l'exclusion des propositions contradictoires,'[11] they were still willing to accept the ambiguity as a pragmatic necessity of speech acts describing a messy world. It is only in the Eleatic school, that the relationship between language, reality and being moves to the foreground of a discussion of ἀλήθεια which seeks to *verify* it dialogically.[12]

The Role of Non-Contradiction in Definitions of 'Philosophy'

This logic of non-contradiction, persistent in definitions of philosophy building upon Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle despite many lost battles against religion and law throughout the subsequent Hellenistic and medieval periods, was reinforced once again in the 18th century, when philosophy in Europe conclusively superseded theology as the overarching meta-discipline of knowledge and wisdom on the one hand, and had to grapple with the competition of the emerging empirical sciences on the other.[13] Definitions reflective of Kant's reification of philosophy as the absolute 'science of the general principles of knowledge and of the ultimate objects attainable by knowledge'('Wissenschaft von den letzten Zwecken der menschlichen Vernunft')[14] held sway throughout most of the 19th century and commonly – though by no means unanimously – built upon the diagnostic presence of 'principled', 'systematic', 'rational' and 'critical' modes of asking questions about knowledge, ontology, or metaphysics, and the presumably universal notions extrapolatable from answers to them. They arguably prepared the ground for the rise of logical positivism and analytical philosophy during much of the 20th century. Yet the post-Kantian consensus was soon to be shattered again by many competing countercurrents towards the end of the 19th century, ushering in new definitions of philosophy, driven by aesthetic, historical, philological, or political considerations.

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11   Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque,* p. 124, n. 79.

12   Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque,* pp. 140-143.

13   For an array of competing definitions from this period see e.g. Ritter, Gründer et al., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* vol. VII (1989), pp. 714-31. For brief historical overviews of the developments leading up to and beyond the juncture of Kant, see also Schnädelbach, 'Was ist Philosophie?', pp. 11-28 and Sela, 'Philosophy's Ascendancy', pp. 5-21.

14   Kant 1800=1968, vol. IX: 25.

This new tension, distinctively palpable in Wittgenstein when he categorically states that '[p]hilosophy is not one of the natural sciences',[15] led to the large-scale demise of doctrinal definitions of philosophical knowledge in favor of its conceptualization as an *activity,* merely aiming at 'the logical clarification of thoughts' against the 'bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language'.[16] Eventually, it resulted in the reinstatement of *Lebensphilosophie*, with its abandonment of the enlightenment impetus and insistence on epistemological grounding in favor of the polyvalence of hermeneutic approaches to philosophical problems. Another 'escape' move was the renewed interest in perception, emotion and other instantiations of consciousness with the rise of phenomenology in the early 20th century, or, indeed, the radical jettisoning of any scientific or historical pretensions and the ensuing happy marriage of philosophy with literature during later phases. Witness, for instance, Rorty's interpretation and approval of Derrida's rejection of determinate meaning, and, *a fortiori*, non-contradiction and truth, which culminates in the quasi-defeatist claim:[17]

> Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing. It is delimited, as in any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition – a family romance involving, e.g. Father Parmenides, honest Uncle Kant, and brother Derrida.

On balance, then, a historically non-contingent, *normatively* valid definition of philosophy obviously failed to stabilize during the last century, as it did during the centuries before Kant, largely due to the insight that 'philosophy' could never escape the self-questioning without ending up in an infinite regress. On this definitional loop, Bertrand Russell wrote in his 1959 booklet *The Wisdom of the West*: [18]

> We may note one peculiar feature of philosophy. If someone asks the question what is mathematics, we can give him a dictionary definition, let us say the science of number, for the sake of argument. As far as it goes this is an uncontroversial statement... Definitions may be given in this

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15   Wittgenstein, 'Notes on Logic'.

16   Wittgenstein (ed. Anscombe) 1968: § 109; Priest has a good critique of Wittgenstein's views. See Priest, 'What Is Philosophy?', pp. 191-195.

17   Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing:', p. 91, cited and incisively criticized in Priest, 'What Is Philosophy?', pp. 197-200.

18   Russell, *The Wisdom of the West*, p. 7.

way of any field where a body of definite knowledge exists. But philosophy cannot be so defined. Any definition is controversial and already embodies a philosophic attitude. The only way to find out what philosophy is, is to do philosophy.

Yet another blow against the marshalling of principles of non-contradiction in definitions of philosophy comes from the more recent development of so-called paraconsistent logics in analytic philosophy.[19] 'Dialetheism'– essentially the theory that the negation of *some* true statements may also be true and that denial does not, therefore, necessarily amount to assertion of a negation, would obviously support a definition of philosophy under which it is quite rational to hold certain types of *in*consistent beliefs. To be sure, there is still a role to play for laws of (non-)contradiction, but 'there is a lot more to rationality than consistency'[20] in a dialethetic system, such that counterfactual and hypothetical situations will have a very different position, as will ethical dilemmas and argumentative paradoxes. While it is tempting to apply such paraconsistent approaches to materials outside the dominant European traditions, work in this area has just begun, and, as far as I see, not touched upon pre-Buddhist materials in East Asia so far.[21] Acknowledging, thus, that the role of contradiction in definitions of philosophy may seem either contingent or overrated against the plurality of viewpoints and methods sketched above, it is its relative historical *and* epistemological consistency which would seem to justify a look at its linguistic expression and early history in China below.

Epistemological Universalism vs. Intercultural Hermeneutics

Throughout most of the late 19th and the whole of the 20th century, it was precisely the alleged lack of a broadly 'epistemological' *definiens* for the assignment of ancient Chinese authors, texts or 'schools of thought' to the category of 'philosophy', which formed a recurrent debating ground for its respective sinological proponents and detractors. The very act of asking the question

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19   See for good introductions Parsons, 'True Contradictions', pp. 335-354; Priest, 'To Be *and* Not to Be', pp. 91-130. See Priest, 'What is so bad about contradictions', pp. 411-2, for European historical predecessors.

20   Priest, 'What is so bad about contradictions', p. 422.

21   See, e.g., Deguchi, Garfield and Priest, 'The Way of the Dialetheist', pp. 395-402, along with Tillemans, 'How Do Mādhyamikas Think?', pp. 84-99; Schang, 'Two Indian Dialectical Logics', pp. 45-74, and the contributions to Tanaka, ed., *Buddhism and Contradiction*.

which forms the topic of this volume with respect to China has a long histori(ographi)cal and political prehistory, which might be traced back even beyond the Jesuit beginnings, from which Ori Sela's succinct recent outline of the conflicting Chinese, Japanese, and Western narratives on the topic proceeds,[22] i.e. well down into European Late Antiquity.[23] To continue to pose this question, then, is in a sense deliberately *reductionist* in that it nonchalantly disregards the social and historical underpinnings shaping the notion of philosophy during the crucial Sino-Western intellectual exchanges since the 18th century, which surrounded the appropriation of the corresponding Western discipline and its terminologies in China. Consequently, as Denecke perceptively writes, it is a question, which 'pushes careful readings of Chinese texts into a narrow corner of self-defense, predetermining the type of evidence marshalled for a question that was only asked out of the *historical coincidence* that China's [...] desperate opening to western knowledge happened just around the time analytical philosophy flourished in the Anglophone world'.[24]

The whole history of the encounter – appropriation – rejection – re-appropriation spiral, starting with the Jesuit missions and reaching its preliminary apex with the 'legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate' of the early 2000s, need not be reiterated here.[25] Despite the great historical and cultural interest of the scholarly exchanges surrounding it and the well-taken caveats which arise from a careful description of their subliminal political agendas or the analysis of their often deliberate oversights, it seems to me that there is still a place for attempts to shoulder the heavy, time-honored European 'conceptual baggage' *within* the 'loaded stratosphere of philosophy'.[26] A retreat into seemingly cozier disciplinary environments, such as 'comparative intellectual history', 'intercultural philosophy', 'ethnosemantics', 'rhetorical criticism' etc.,

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22   Sela, 'Philosophy's Ascendancy'.

23   On European perceptions of China during late antiquity and the medieval period see e.g. Poinsotte, 'Les Romains et la Chine', pp. 431-479 and Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China.* Sources on early Chinese perceptions of 'the' West are succinctly summarized in Leslie and Gardiner, *The Roman Empire in Chinese Sources.*

24   Denecke, 'Disciplines in Translation', pp. 23-38.

25   See Sela, 'Philosophy's Ascendancy' and the contributions to Makeham, ed., *Learning to Emulate the Wise* for comprehensive coverage of the emergence of the academic discipline in China. For the later repercussions in the so-called 'legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate' see also Defoort, 'Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy?', pp. 393-413; Defoort, 'Is 'Chinese Philosophy' a proper name?', pp. 625-660, and the three issues 37.1-3 (2005-6) of *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, ed. Carine Defoort and Gě Zhàoguāng 葛兆光.

26   Denecke, 'Disciplines in Translation', p. 39.

which ostentatiously aim at overriding the entrenched universalist/relativist divide or the 'logocentric' conditionality allegedly underpinning it, may seem like a sensible move at first sight. However, I think that reconstructing what was epistemological *competence* according to a set of explicit parameters – regardless of whether these are historically 'Western' or not – has the distinct advantage of being more easily falsifiable than comparative approaches to historical performances and cultural preferences. This might seem like a step back into Sela's fourth appropriation phase of 'applying *zhexue* to China's past',[27] which started after the full consolidation of the term by 1903[28] and gained prominence in the many projects to write histories of Chinese philosophy after the abolishment of the state examination system after 1300 years in 1905. Yet any attempt to uncover early historical precursors that would justify an epistemologically grounded 'philosophy' predicate today, will obviously have to be considerably more constrained.

On the one hand – although one cannot help feeling a nagging doubt about this in view of the current 'nationology fever' (*guóxué rè* 國學熱) in the People's Republic[29] – such endeavors can today afford to rid themselves of an embedding in the politically conditioned tension between programmes of 'reordering the nation's grounding' (*zhěnglǐ guógù* 整理國故) and those of the detractors gathering around the 'across-the-board westernization' (*quánpán xīfānghuà* 全盤西方化) slogan during the Republican period. On the other hand, our knowledge of the most important tool in any such discussion – the early Chinese language – has dramatically changed over the past century.

Finally, on a still more general plane, to assume that a foreign tradition of thought is capable of philosophizing is, as Roetz has repeatedly pointed out, not a mere matter of patronizing tolerance. Rejection of a 'principle of charity' approach, i.e. reduction to a particular and ultimately inappropriable Western notion of thought would inevitably undermine claims for the transcultural validity of philosophy beyond the realm of questions and experiences made by

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27   Sela, 'Philosophy's Ascendancy', pp. 39-51.

28   Zhōng, 'Qīng mò Zhōngguórén duìyú "zhéxué" de zhuīqiú', pp. 159-189.

29   Or, indeed, in the West. OuYang, 'There is No Need for Zhongguo Zhexue to be Philosophy,' pp. 199-223, a late reflection on the 'legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate', 'provides welcome detail on the early phases of the dispute during the Republican period and suggests the introduction of the term 'sinosophy' to get rid of the conceptual baggage of 'Chinese philosophy' and *Zhōngguó zhéxué* 中國哲學. The latter move may be useful in some definitory contexts, but it strikes me as quite naïve in its assumption of the existence of 'autonomous cultural systems of the world' (p. 220) before 'Western philosophical contamination at the end of the nineteenth century' (p. 214).

the Ancient Greeks, not to speak of 'the' West, writ large.[30] The intercultural validity problem hinted at here is comparable to the conflict between 'presentism', the invocation of concepts of the present to the study of the past, and 'strict anti-anachronism' in the theory of the history of science and ideas. Anti-presentists would champion an 'availability principle', according to which only such interpretations of the past are legitimate which exclude 'linguistic and epistemic resources unavailable to the historical authors and their contemporaries'.[31] While strict anti-presentism faces serious dilemmas in differentiating between past events and the view past thinkers had of them, radical presentists easily fall prey to assumptions of historical continuity or precursorship, overlooking the historical ruptures and non-teleological features which may turn out to be crucial to an interpretation of the past.[32] At the end of the day, it seems that we will be unable to transgress the hermeneutic circle lingering here: as much as we need to be careful not to project categories and continuities onto past texts and societies – be they located in Classical Greece, Warring States China or Çatal Hüyük –, as much as we need to scrutinize any transfer of categories and comparisons between them, we can never fully escape our own intentions and presuppositions, if we want to coherently articulate anything about the past at all.[33]

Language, Writing and Truth in Early China: The Shaky Foundations of Deficit Claims

Most sinologists critical of an acceptance of the label 'philosophy' for the texts, arguments, and practices of pre-imperial China throughout the 20th century (Gernet, Granet, Moritz, Trauzettel, Vandermeersch, to list but a few of the more prominent names) have, more or less explicitly, based their arguments on perceived 'absences' or 'deficits' of its conceptual subcomponents in China, such as a lack of notions of truth, individuality, utopian thinking or justice. Given the prevalence of epistemological criteria within philosophy conceived as a science of science in the 20th century, especially since the 'linguistic turn' in analytic philosophy, such deficit claims, also commonly encountered with

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30   Roetz, 'Gibt es *eine* chinesische Philosophie?', pp. 20-39.

31   Spoerhase, 'Presentism and Precursorship in Intellectual History', p. 59.

32   See Spoerhase, 'Presentism and Precursorship in Intellectual History', for a well-argued discussion of the pitfalls of both sides.

33   Cf. Spoerhase, 'Presentism and Precursorship in Intellectual History', p. 65, referring to Burke.

respect to science itself, as well as *prima facie* extra-philosophical notions such as 'history', 'nature', or even concepts like 'guilt' or 'melancholy' encountered in other perennially re-opening sinological debating arenas, have typically been coupled with corresponding deficit imputations targeting the capacity of the Classical Chinese language to express abstractions, sentencehood, counterfactuality, temporal reference, subjecthood, parts of speech categoriality etc.[34] More often than not, these have been made without any sensitivity for the diachronic and diatopic stratifications of the Chinese language.[35] Moreover, they have been coupled with quite naïve conflations of linguistic categories with units in the writing system used to represent them. With Granet's 'emblematic' interpretation of the Chinese script (*and* culture) as the primary warrantor, ancillary discourses, already incipient with Herder, von Humboldt and Steinthal, have consequently evolved with Derrida, Foucault, Hansen, Luhmann, Stetter, Vandermeersch (to again cite but a few of the more well-known names), which attach the observed 'propositional' deficits to the non-alphabetic nature of the script 'in which' argumentation was carried out, rather than to language itself.[36] Not only is the whole discourse on pictography

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34   For good catalogues of such claims, and sustained attempts at their refutation see, e.g., Roetz, 'Validity in Zhou Thought', pp. 69-113; Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic*.

35   On the importance of diachronic sensitivity in the translation of ancient Chinese philosophical key terms see, e.g., Köster, 'Zu einigen Grundbegriffen chinesischer Philosophie', pp. 235-37 and Pines, 'Lexical changes in *Zhanguo* texts', pp. 691-705. On early diatopic and dialectal varition see, e.g., Zhōu and Yóu, *Fāngyán yǔ Zhōngguó wénhuà*, pp. 1-53; Dǒng, *Zhōu Qín liǎng-Hàn Wèi Jìn nánběicháo fāngyán gòngtóngyǔ chūtàn*; Liú et al. '«Fāngyán» yǔ fāngyán dìlǐxué', pp. 97-278; Huà, *Zhōu-Qín-Hàn-Jìn fāngyán yánjiū shǐ*, in Chinese. Serruys, *The Chinese Dialects of Han Time*; Behr, 'Role of Language in Early Chinese Constructions of Ethnic Identity', pp. 567-587; Casacchia and Gianninoto, *Storia della linguistica cinese*, pp. 44-56.

36   Cf. Schlobinski, 'Zum Prinzip des Relativismus von Schriftsystemen', pp. 117-146; Roetz, 'Gibt es *eine* chinesische Philosophie?'. For a critique of similar clichés about the alleged consequences of Egyptian and cuneiform writing see Quack, 'Die Rolle der Hieroglyphen in der Theorie vom griechischen Vokalalphabet', pp. 75-98 and Cancik-Krischbaum, 'Der Anfang aller Schreibkunst ist der Keil', pp. 121-149. An amusing, if entirely misguided attempt to construe the modern Chinese equivalent for '-sophy' – *zhé* 哲 – etymographically as a combination of the elements 'hands'+'axe'+'mouth' in the sense of 'to crack or split something in speech', i.e. via the German metaphor of 'Nüsseknacken' for 'to think hard' is provided by Grimm, 'Sinologische Anmerkungen zum europäischen Philosophiebegriff', p. 6. Not only do the paleographic forms of 哲 not contain 'hands'– in fact two elements which are probably to be identified as 'chopped-off wood' (Hé, *Zhànguó gǔwénzìdiǎn*, p. 927) – but 折 is obviously simply phonophoric in 哲 ! The backgrounds of Nishi Amane's 西周 (1829-1897) choice of *tetsugaku* 哲學 as the translation term for

as an obstacle to abstraction *conceptually* mistaken,[37] and the argument of a sustained influence of writing upon thought quite misleading with respect to a largely illiterate early Chinese society; the idea of a completely non-phonological processing of written characters by the human brain is also *empirically* untenable.[38]

With regard to the possibility of reconstructing Ancient Chinese concepts of 'truth', so crucial to most definitions of 'philosophy' since the 18th century, Harbsmeier writes after a fine survey of its subtypes and the lexical and syntactical means of expressing them:[39]

> We conclude that far from finding the notion of truth inconceivable, ancient Chinese philosophers frequently asked themselves whether some statement was true or not, although they did not show the same degree of philosophical preoccupation with factual truth as Westerners might expect. The Chinese regularly applied the predicate 'true' to words or statements. They often referred to the nominalized notion of truth. [...] The ancient Chinese may have taken a pragmatic approach to language and thinking. But as pragmatists should, they had plenty of use for the scientific notion of objective or truth. [...] [However, their] key concept was that of the Way (*tao*) of conducting human affairs, not of objective factual or doctrinal truth.

Historically, one of the most common techniques of validating truth claims in classical thought is via the principle of non-contradiction, first *explicitly* for-

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philosophy in 1873 are richly detailed in Sūn, 'Lùn Amane cóng "philosophy" dào "zhéxué" yī cí de fānyì guòchēng', pp. 122-131.

37   For two good arguments, one linguistic and one philosophical, as to why graphs of logographic scripts such as Chinese and Egyptian may never be meaningfully analyzed as 'pictographic', see Boltz, 'Pictographic Myths', pp. 39-54 and Jespersen and Reintges, 'Tractarian *Sätze*, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and the Very Idea of Script as a Picture', pp. 1-19.

38   There is a vast recent literature on this topic. For good introductions see, e.g., Ziegler, Tan and Perry, 'Phonology Matters', pp. 234-8 or Han and Bi, 'Oral Spelling and Writing in a Logographic Language', pp. 23-28.

39   Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic,* 207. On 'truth' concepts in early China see also Roetz, 'Validity in Zhou Thought', pp. 83-84, pp. 87-92, and several of the sinological contributions to Schmidt-Glintzer, Mittag and Rüsen, eds., *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology*; for fresh views at Mohist 'truth' see Sòng, 'Xiān-Qín pànduàn jù lǐ de zhēnyǔ jù biǎozhèng', pp. 42-49 and Fraser, 'Truth in Moist Dialectics', pp. 351-368.

mulated in Plato's *Republic*[40] (ca. 380 BC) and in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*[41] in Greece, in Pāṇinian grammar[42] and in early Buddhist logic in India.[43] Several ways of expressing contradictions in terms and logical incoherence in early Chinese literature have been reviewed in the literature,[44] but the closest equivalent of a *technical term* denoting a logical inconsistency of the type '¬ (p ∧ ¬ p)', i.e. to hold the same thing to be something and not something is untrue, was probably the word denoted by the variant graphs *bèi* 悖~誖. Before proceeding to look at the rhetoric of 'self-refutation'[45] and logical incoherence in some textual examples constructed with the help of this term, it will be necessary to understand why it was *lexically* and *morphologically* uniquely suitable to express statements of self-contradiction. To this end, the following linguistic digression will hopefully be excused.

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40   *Republic* 4.436c: 'Δῆλον ὅτι ταὐτὸν τἀναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταὐτόν | γε καὶ πρὸς ταὐτὸν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἅμα' ('It is obvious that the same thing will never do or suffer opposites in the same respect in relation to the same thing and at the same time').

41   *Metaphysics* 4.1005b: 'τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό' ('It is impossible that the same thing can at the same time both belong and not belong to the same object and in the same relation'). Aristotle's view of the principle is, however, subverted by other passages in his work; for a clear discussion of the many problems involved see Cohen, 'Aristotle on the Principle of Non-Contradiction', pp. 359-370.

42   Staal, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics*, pp. 109-128. Although as notoriously difficult to date as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is now often dated to ca. 350 BC, see, e.g., Witzel, 'Moving Targets?', pp. 287-310.

43   Tucci, 'Buddhist Logic before Diṅnāga (Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, *Tarkaśāstra*s)', p. 467. For the later development in Dharmakīrti's (7th c.) *Nyāya Bindu* see, e.g., Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, 1: pp. 103-105, p. 414 and 2: p. 8, p. 94, pp. 196-197; for a general taxonomy of Indian arguments about self-refutation see Perrett, 'Self-refutation in Indian philosophy', pp. 237-263. Although one of the still most thorough treatments of *The Principle of Contradiction* occurs in a work by the eminent Buddhologist Edward Conze (1904-1979) from 1932, originally intended as a Habilitation under Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), he only became seriously interested in Buddhism and its potential reconciliability with to Marxist dialectical materialism after his emigration to the UK in June of the following year.

44   See e.g. Leslie, *Argument by Contradiction in Pre-Buddhist Reasoning*; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*, p. 169, p. 235, p. 319, p. 342, p. 449 and Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic*, pp. 212-218.

45   Although some scholars would want to differentiate between the two terms, 'self-refutation' and 'self-contradiction' will be used largely synonymous throughout this paper.

The Linguistic Prehistory of *bèi* as a Marker of Self-Contradiction

Paleography

The characters *bèi* 誖 and *bèi* 悖 representing the concept of 'self-refutation' in the edited literature do not seem to be reliably attested in pre-Qín epigraphical materials so far.[46] The *Shuōwén* 說文[47] defines the small seal script form 誖 as a phonosemantic character meaning 'chaotic, rebellious' (*luàn yě* 亂也), and adds that it has a 'heart'-classifier variant 㤄 (悖). Later allographs include a 'mouth'-variant 哱 and a secondary augmentation by *shū* 殳 'to stab with a spear' of the heart-determined form resulting in 愨.[48] This kind of classifier variation is well-known from other speech act and psych verbs encountered in Warring States excavated texts and simply reflects the orthographic variability of the writing system in pre-Qín China.[49]

Xǔ Shèn 許慎 furthermore mentions a curious associative *zhòuwén* 籀文-form[50] 嚞 (*bèi* 𡆛) here and in two other entries,[51] where it is once glossed as a variant of *bèi* 誖, once as a variant of *bèi* 悖. Strangely enough, the latter form 悖 is not itself lemmatized in the *Shuōwén* text, although it not only occurs in the entries just mentioned, but also in the postface[52] to the 'dictionary'.[53] In the earlier syssemantic variant 𡆛, the 'chaotic, rebellious' semantics would seem to be iconically coded by the flipped juxtaposition of two elements conventionally identified as *huò* 或. These ultimately depict two thrust weapons

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46   Cf. Hé, *Zhànguó gǔwénzìdiǎn*, vol. 2: 1300-1301.

47   *Shuōwén* 3, 言部: 1614.

48   See *Jíyùn*, *s.v.*, '悖, 亦作愨'.

49   Cf. Qiú, *Wénzìxué gàiyào*, pp. 167–169, Hé, *Zhànguó wénzì tōnglùn*, pp. 196-200.

50   I.e. a Late Western Zhōu big seal script form, believed to stem from the lost character manual by Scribe Zhòu (*Shǐ Zhòu piān* 史籀篇), allegedly a scribe-official at the court of King Xuān 宣 (827-782 BC), cf. *Qiú Xīguī* 裘錫圭, *Wénzìxué gàiyào*, 48-50 for discussion.

51   *Shuōwén* 6, 角部: 2851, *s.v.* 嚞: '𡆛 , 籀文誖字' and 11, 火部: 6394, *s.v.* 愨: '𡆛, 籀文悖字'.

52   In the passage: 又見《倉頡篇》中'幼子承詔', 因曰：古帝之所作也, 其辭有神僊之術焉。' 其迷誤不諭, 豈不悖哉！ 'When, again, they see [the phrase] 'the little one takes on the decree' in the *Cāng Jié piān*, and therefore say: 'it was created by a thearch of old, in whose words the art of a spiritual immortal is contained', then they are being misled and without understanding. Isn't it really self-refuting?!' Cf. Winter, '… *und Cang Jie erfand die Schrift*', pp. 557-574 for a heavily commented study and translation of this postface.

53   It is doubtful, whether 'dictionary' is an apt designation of Xǔ Shèn's work. For some arguments articulating this doubt see Bottéro and Harbsmeier, 'The *Shuowen Jiezi* Dictionary and the Human Sciences in China', pp. 249-271.

'getting at each other',[54] as still readily retrievable from the oracle bone prede-cessors of the bare phonophoric 字, such as 㠯毛, 㠯毛 or 㫃毛. The osteographical form, however, would be more properly transcribed as an inverted concatenation 㞷 of *róng* 戎 'weapons of war'[55] or with a later unattested *kǎishū* 楷書 normalization 㞷. The first epigraphical orthography featuring a genuine dou-bled *huò* 或 only comes from the Late Western Zhōu 'Lǔ Zhòng *guǐ*' 旅仲簋 bronze inscription, where the character occurs as a personal name of the ves-sel recipient.[56] Thus, even if we acknowledge that *huò* 或 (OC *ɢɢʷək) 'eventually; someone' etc., *yù* 域 (*ɢʷ(r)ək) 'territory' and *guó* 國 (*kkʷək) 'fief-dom, state' were often used interchangeably in pre-Qín inscriptions, one can still not construe 㙊 as the synsemantic depiction of two 'territories' fighting against each other, as per Duàn Yùcái 段玉裁 (1735-1815).[57] If the two charac-ters are historically related at all,[58] despite the fact that one refers to a very concrete, physical sphere and the other to language and abstraction, the replacement of the odd synsemantic character by a straightforward phonose-mantic version was most likely late, and due to the purely orthographic cumbersomeness of writing characters like 㞷 or 㙊.[59]

Phonology

On the phonological side, the *Guǎngyùn* 廣韻 gives a Middle Chinese reading 蒲昧切 (i.e. MC *bwojH*[60]) for the two characters 悖 and 誖, as well as for its

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54   But weapons different from a simple *gē* 戈, juxtaposition of which would have resulted in the iconically akin character *cán* 戔 (OC *s-llan) 'to damage, hurt, be vicious' (cf. GSR 155a-b; items cited as 'GSR' refer to the numbering in Karlgren, *Grammatica Serica Recensa*, *passim*), which, if augmented by a speech classifier comes to mean *jiàn* 諓 (OC *sl[a,e]ns) 'be insincere, artful' (GSR 155m).

55   See for a list and arrangement of the relevant forms into the diviner group diachrony Liú, ed., *Xīn jiǎgǔwén biān*, p. 960.

56   *Jīnwén jíchéng* #3872: '旅仲乍 (作) 誖寶殷 (簋)。其萬年子= (子子) 孫= (孫孫) 永用亯 (享) 考。' ('Lǔ Zhòng (had) made a treasured *gǔ*-tureen for Bèi. May son's sons and grandsons' grandsons eternally use it to feast the deceased forefathers.')

57   '兩國相違，舉戈相向, *Shuōwén jiězì zhù* 3A/97b.

58   As, for instance, disputed by Mǎ, *Shuōwén jiězì liùshū shūzhèng*, apud Lǐ et al., *Gǔwénzì gǔlín*, vol. 3: p. 66, who maximally allows for some metaphorical connection, or by the editors of the *Jiǎgǔwénzì gǔlín* 甲骨文字詁林, Yú, Yáo et al., *Jiǎgǔ wénzì gǔlín*, p. vol. 3: 2323/#2403.

59   Cf. Huáng, *Gǔwénzì pǔxì shūzhèng*, vol. 4: 3279.

60   Throughout this paper, the 'beta version 0.99' of the Baxter-Sagart system for Middle Chi-nese transcriptions and Old Chinese reconstructions is used, in the notation detailed in Gassmann and Behr, *Grammatik des Antikchinesischen*, chap. 10.

phonophoric *bèi* 孛 'comet; halo of a comet', which would regularly reconstruct to Old Chinese *[N,m]pp[ə,u]t-s.[61] A reconstruction in *-u- is corroborated by the fact that *bèi* rhymes in a mixed *-uts/*-ups series in one *Shījīng* 詩經 poem,[62] and in the following prosimetric rhyme from a famous passage on 'learning' in the *Lǐjì* 禮記:[63]

> 今之教者（…）言及于數，進而不顧其安，使人不由其誠，教人不盡其材；其施之也悖, 其求之也佛。

> According to the system of teaching now-a-days, [the masters] (…) speak of the learners' making rapid advances, and pay no regard to their reposing (in what they have acquired). In what they lay on their learners they are not sincere, nor do they put forth all their ability in teaching them. What they inculcate is contrary to what is right,[64] and the learners are disappointed in what they seek for.

Here, *bèi* 悖 (*[N,m]-pp[ə,u]t-s) and *fú* 佛 (MC *bjut < *bət) clearly rhyme together, and they were even used synonymously in a paronomastic pun in the biography of Dōngfāng Shuò 東方朔 (154-93) in the *Hànshū* 漢書 slightly later:[65]

> 夫談有悖於目拂 (var. 佛) 於耳謬於心而便於身者 …

> Now, if in your talking there is something resisting the eyes, defying the ears, running counter to one's mind, yet still convenient for the body …

Taken together, this evidence allows for a quite confident reconstruction of *[N,m]-pp[ə,u]t-s.

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61   Items separated by commas in square brackets indicate competing regular sources for a Middle Chinese form, when the available inner-Chinese evidence is not sufficient to decide between the two possibilities.

62   *Máoshī* #257, 'Sāngróu' 桑柔, 13.

63   *Lǐjì* 18:205 (1.15); transl. Legge 2:86.

64   It would be very well possible to translate 悖 as 'self-refuting' in this context, since it does not necessarily carry connotations of morality.

65   *Hànshū* 65:2868.

Morphology and Word Formation

The Old Chinese language underwent dramatic typological changes during the pre-Qín period, which led to the rampant loss of its once abundant and productive derivational morphology, along with the concomitant rise of lexical tones ('tonogenesis'), the abandonment of a once sesquisyllabic root structure, and the subsequent creation of a new disyllabic foot structure of lexical words.[66] With the exception of traces in a few conservative peripheral dialects, especially in today's Mǐn 閩 and Jìn 晉 speaking areas,[67] this process left the fairly unified languages of the early Imperial and Medieval periods approximating the quasi-isolating tonal typology characteristic of the vast majority of Middle Chinese and Modern dialects. It is this 'new', morphologically 'impoverished' shape of the language, which was eventually projected back onto the pre-imperial state of affairs by the first Western missionaries and philosophers who became interested in Chinese during the Míng and Qīng periods and who almost unanimously failed to question the typological continuity of the language behind the deceptive continuity of its logosyllabographic writing system.

Under a theory of Old Chinese word formation such as Sagart's[68] or Jīn Lìxīn's[69], the lexical root of a word in Old Chinese is minimally the *Consonant Vowel (Consonant) structure stripped of all additional affixal material. The reconstructible Old Chinese derivational morphology is by and large *agglutinative*, such that the root structure is left intact by any given affixation process, in that affixes are monofunctional in a particular word formation, and since they – in opposition to the *inflecting* type – typically do not encode paradigms.[70] Against such presuppositions, then, one does not have to be very imaginative to see that the lexical root of *[N,m]-pp[ə,u]-t-s must be *p[ə,u]t, i.e. the

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66   See on this last point Féng, 'Prosodic Structure and Compound Words in Classical Chinese', pp. 197-260; Féng, *Hànyǔ yùnlǜ jùfǎxué*.

67   Cf. Sagart, 'Vestiges of Archaic Chinese Derivational Affixes', pp. 123-142.

68   Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese*.

69   Jīn, *Shànggǔ Hànyǔ xíngtài yánjiū*.

70   Whether ablaut, i.e. morphologically conditioned main vowel apophony which would interrupt the segmental integrity of the lexical root, was operative in Old Chinese as well (as per Pulleyblank, 'Close/Open Ablaut in Sino-Tibetan', pp. 230-240) is currently unclear. Suffice it to say that all ablaut phenomena can in principle be morphonologically reinterpreted as (zero) infixation of the lexical root (cf. Pulleyblank, 'Ablaut and Initial Voicing in Old Chinese Morphology', pp. 1-21; Gassmann and Behr *Grammatik des Antikchinesischen*, pp. 412-414 and 462-463), such that the overall agglutinative typology is maintained.

negative *fú* 弗 or *bù* 不, itself possibly a suffixed version of the bare negative
*p(ə)-, integrating a pre-Old Chinese pronominal agreement or object marker
*-t- into the root.[71] What, then, is the role performed by the other affixes?
Under Baxter and Sagart's morphological theory, prefix *N- is a valency dimin-
isher, i.e. an element typically turning a transitive verb into an intransitive, or
a causative/applicative into a regular transitive verb. The *phonetic* conse-
quences of this nasal prefix, which is unspecified for place (i.e. it assimilates to
the following root initial) are in most environments undistinguishable from
those of the bilabial prefix *m-, which changes non-volitional verbs into voli-
tional ones, nouns into volitional verbs, and verbs into agentive nouns.[72] Suffix
*-s, on the other hand, has mainly three functions, namely the formation of
deverbal nouns out of verbs, the marking of perfective-resultative aspect in
verbs, and the encoding of exoactivity, i.e. the outward direction of the verbal
action. Since the end-product of the double affixation in *[N,m]pp[ə,u]t-s is
not a noun and volitionality clearly plays no role in the verb semantics of *bèi*,
the most likely combination involved here is that of detransitivizing *N- com-
bined with exoactive *-s. Like in the contrasts between *bài* 敗 < MC *paejH <
OC *pprat-s 'to defeat' and *bài* 敗 < *baejH < *N-pprat-s 'to be defeated' or *jiàng*
降 < *kaewngH < *kkruŋ-s 'let sth. down, step down from' and *xiáng* < *haewng*

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71 *Bù* 不 has the Middle Chinese readings *pjuw* (甫鳩切) and *pjuwX* (方久切), the latter
      probably assigned secondarily, i.e. in analogy to *fú* 弗 *pjut*. Ultimately the shared under-
      lying OC negative was probably just *p- (as opposed to the *m-series negatives), which
      was then *schwa*-vocalized *by default*, if attaching to a following verb (cf. Pulleyblank,
      'Some Notes on Morphology and Syntax in Classical Chinese', pp. 39-40). For competing
      fusion theories about the syntax and morphology of *fú* 弗 see Boodberg, 'The Final -t of
      弗 fu' (Notes on Chinese Morphology and Syntax; 1), and 'The Morphology of Final N and
      T' (Notes on Chinese Morphology and Syntax; 3), reprinted in Cohen, ed., *Selected Works
      of Peter A. Boodberg*, pp. 430-431, pp. 432-434. Dīng, 'Shì fǒudìngcí "fú" "bù"', pp. 967-996,
      Huáng, 'Qín-Hàn yǐqián gǔ Hànyǔ zhōng de fǒudìngcí 'fú' 'bù' yánjiū', pp. 1-23, and Harb-
      smeier, '*Fú* in the Mawangdui Manuscripts of the Laozi and in the Remnants of Qin Law',
      pp. 1-60. Causative explanations of *fú* account for some of the syntactic facts quite nicely,
      but they fail to elucidate the phonological processes at work: neither 不使 *pə + *srəq
      (Gassmann [Gāo Sīmàn 高思曼], 'Fǒudìngcí "fú" de jùfǎ', pp 1-9) nor the fusion of caus-
      ative *s- + *pə- with unexplained subsequent affix hopping to *pə-s (Aldridge, 'Clitic
      Climbing in Archaic Chinese', pp. 171-178) would go to MC *pjut*. (OC *pə-s, an unattested
      syllable, would result most likely in MC *p(j)uwH*).

72 Other usages in the realm of *nominal* morphology include the marking of body parts,
      animal names, and grain designations. See Baxter and Sagart, 'Old Chinese Word Struc-
      ture and Affixes in the Baxter-Sagart 0.99 System'.

< *N-kkruŋ 'to submit oneself', the detransitivized verb is commonly inter-preted as (medio-)passive or reflexive.

In other words, from the bare negative root *pə- 'not', a transitive, exoactive verb *p[ə,u]-t-s is first formed, literally 'to negate someone/-thing', which becomes 'to be negated ~ to negate oneself' after prefixation by the valency diminisher *N-. It is from this semantic basis as a verb 'to negate' that both metaphorical extensions and lexicalizations 'to be rebellious, refractory', 'to go against, contravene, disrupt' *vs.* 'to be or become confused, incoherent, contra-dictory' must have arisen.[73] Notice also that medieval rhyming dictionaries note a second pronunciation for *bèi* 詩 – *pwojH* (補妹切), though not for *bèi* 悖, which would preserve the expected reading for the non-intransitivized OC root *pp[ə,u]t-s. If this is not a lexicographic ghost, it would mean that the active-exoactive usages with full lexical objects resulting in the Early Imperial usages as 'to be rebellious, refractory', 'to go against, contravene, disrupt'[74] would have been neatly differentiated in the *spoken* language from the passive-reflexive usages going back to *N-, which developed into the 'to be or become confused, incoherent, self-contradicting' semantics.

Just as in the case of the Old Chinese sentential negative *fēi* 非, which emerged from the fusion of the negative *bù* 不 (OC *pə-) with the archaic cop-ular verb *wéi* (隹~唯~惟~維 *(tə)-wuj) to yield *fēi* 非 (< MC *pɨij* < OC *pəj) – the same copula, incidentally, which was used in *suī* 雖 (OC *s-(tə)-wuj) 'let it be the case that'→ 'even' and *wēi* 微 (OC *ma-t-wuj) 'it has not been the case that'→ 'if it had not been for' in counterfactual or irrealis marking in the early literature –[75] the root of the word written by the different *bèi* orthographies was a negative verb derived from *bù* 不.[76]

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73   For a good selection of early glosses see Zōng et al., *Gùxùn huìzuǎn*, p. 793 (*s.v.* 悖) and p. 2121 (*s.v.* 詩).

74   On which see Xiè, *"'bèiluàn"jiě'*.

75   Behr, 'Morphological Notes on the Old Chinese Counterfactual', pp. 55-87.

76   During the last stages of the revision of this paper I became aware of a new proposal which comes to a similar conclusion about the relationship between *bù* and *bèi*, but analyses *bèi* further as the imperative base of a word family containing *bié* 別 *pret/ *N-pret 'seperate' (vt./vi.) and *liè* 裂 *C-ret 'rip, split, divide' as its allofamic members and externally cognate to Tibetan' *brad | brad | dbrad | brod* 'to scrape' (Huáng, *Cóng Hàn-Zàng bǐjiào lùn shànggǔ Hànyǔ nèibù gòunǐ*, chap. 1.3.3 and 5.2.). A full assessment of this inter-esting proposal would necessitate an extensive discussion of Huáng's theory of the cor-respondences between OC and Old Tibetan paradigmatic ablaut morphology in tense-aspect marking, and I will therefore have to reserve it for another occasion.

The Expression of Self-Refutation in Early Chinese Texts

It was precisely against this etymological background of negativity, it would seem, that the term *bèi* came to operate as the most effective expression for the notion of logical incoherence, or 'self-refutation' in early Chinese argumentative prose. 'Negation of the object' ('Negation des Gegenstandes') and 'negative behavior' ('negatives Verhalten'), says Hegel in his disquisitions on *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, are the conditions for understanding.[77] While *bèi* has been discussed elsewhere, mostly with respect to its usage in the Mohist canons,[78] let us briefly look at some examples again. Like in the case of other notions used to make validity claims in Early Chinese, *bèi* is most often found in contexts where the social or ethical adequacy of a certain thought or action is at stake, not its propositional logic. Thus, one can sense the *zhèng míng* 正名 topos lurking behind passages like the following in the *Huáinánzǐ* 淮南子:[79]

> 亂國則不然。言與行相悖, 情與貌相反, 禮飾以煩, 樂優以淫。

> In a disordered country, this is not the case. Words and actions are mutually contradictory, emotions and looks are mutually opposed. Rituals are adorned up to a point when they become a hassle, and music is indulged in up to a point when it becomes licentious.

Here, *bèi* is used as a moral classification of the state of affairs in a world in decline. It is largely synonymous with *fǎn* in the following parallel sentence, and it relies on the reciprocal pronoun *xiāng* at its side to fully establish the relation between the two objects compared. The focus is on the *behavior* of not recognizing the logical consistency of something, not on the theory of what gives rise to such failures, as also in the following passage in the *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 呂氏春秋:[80]

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77 Hegel 1833-36, 18:154, as pointed out by Holenstein, 'Philosophie außerhalb Europas', pp. 65-77, n. 13.

78 See esp. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*, pp. 199-200 and Roetz, 'Validity in Zhou Thought', pp. 93-95.

79 *Huáinánzǐ* 11.18:176; Wallacker trans. 1962: 34. On the social background of the Confucian *zhèngmíng* discourse see also Gassmann, *Cheng ming*; Makeham, 'Names, Actualities and the Emergence of Essentialist Theories of Naming', pp. 341-63 and Loy, 'Analects 13.3 and the Doctrine of "Correcting Names"', pp. 19-36.

80 *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 7.3.2: 8b-9b; cf. Knoblock and Riegel, trans. *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, pp. 179-180.

攻伐之與救守一實也, 而取舍人異, 以辨說去之, 終無所定論。固不知,
悖也。知而欺心, 誣也。誣悖之士, 雖辨無用矣。是非其所取而取其所
非也, 是利之而反害之也, 安之而反危之也。

To attack and to defend are one reality, but the people differ in accepting
or rejecting it. Rejecting it on account of discrimination or persuasion,
there will, at the end of the day, be no ground for a definite discourse
about them. To obstinately fail to take notice of that is self-contradictory.
Knowingly to pretend otherwise is deceptive. Scholars who are self-con-
tradictory or deceptive may well be discriminating, but it is of no use.
This is because it amounts to negate what they accept and at the same
time to accept what they negate, to benefit someone and at the same
time to harm his family, to safeguard someone and at the same time
endanger him.

It is easy to see, how from such morally loaded usages of *bèi,* the word could
lexically end up as a mere qualifier of the ethical or ritual inappropriateness of
actions:

釋己之所得為, 而責於其所不得制, 悖矣。

It is perverse to demand of someone something over which he has no
control instead of that which it is possible for him to do.'[81]

然則性而已, 則人無禮義, 不知禮義。人無禮義則亂, 不知禮義則悖。
然則性而已, 則悖亂在己。

But if one starts out with human nature by itself, then man has no ritual
propriety or rectitude, he does not understand ritual propriety or recti-
tude. If man lacks ritual propriety and rectitude, then he will be prone to
rebel, if he does not understand ritual propriety and rectitude he will be
incoherent. But if one starts out with human nature by itself, then the
incoherence and the rebelliousness is within man himself.[82]

As a consequence of this development, Hán Fēi 韩非, at the end of the Warring
States period, often uses *bèi* already as a quasi-synonym of 'stupidity, delusion',
for instance when he quotes it in one row with 'Babies, infants, (blind~),

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81   *Huáinánzǐ* 9.18:152; Ames & Huai-nan, *The Art of Rulership*, p. 208.
82   *Xúnzǐ* 17.23 (8.5):293; cf. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 3:154, *mod. auct.*

imbeciles, deaf, mad or crazy people ...' (嬰兒、 (盲 ~) 癡聾、狂悖之人⋯)[83].
Even when *bèi* refers to language, rather than actions or beliefs, it can still tend
toward this pragmatic, judgmental usage:

> 夫繁文以相假, 飾辭以相悖, 數譬以相移, 外人之身使不得反其意, 則論
> 便然後害生也。

> But, while involved diction to falsify [the argument], decorated words to
> pervert it, numerous metaphors to shift it, raising the voice so that it is
> impossible to attain to [understanding] may be convenient to the argu-
> ment, still harm results from these.[84]

Similarly, the clearest instance of a passage pointing at contradiction in the
Confucian *Analects*[85] operates with *huò* 惑 (OC *ɢɢʷək) 'be deluded, confus-
ing'. This is a homophone of 或 (OC *ɢɢʷə-k) 'someone, sometimes', 'it may
happen that', later grammaticalized into a conjunction 'or', itself in turn a
*k-distributive etymologically based on the root of the general existential verb
yǒu 有. The contradiction is thus not expressed via negativity, as in the case of
bèi, but by gesturing to competing cases of 'being there' via distributivity, an
elegant morphological way of expressing that you 'can't have it both ways'.

   It would be mistaken, however, to assume that the kind of statements clas-
sified as *bèi* stop at this merely evaluative level. First of all, it is clear that several
Warring States and early imperial authors were well aware that *bèi* operates at
the level of *categories* of objects, and that it is the task of the rhetorically skilled
person to recognize this categoriality, if he wants to escape self-contradiction
in argumentation:

> 類不悖, 雖久同理。

> What is in (one) category is not self-contradictory, even after a long time
> it conforms in its structural principles.[86]

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83   *Hánfēizǐ* 9.30.18:165. Various editions have *máng* 盲 instead of or along with *chī* 癡. In
      many passages of the *Lǚshì chūnqiū* Knoblock and Riegel also translate the term as 'mad-
      ness'.

84   *Hánshī Wàizhuàn* 6.6a; Hightower, *Han shih wai chuan*, p. 196.

85   *Lúnyǔ* 論語 12.10:270: '愛之欲其生，惡之欲其死。既欲其生，又欲其死，是惑
      也。' ('If you love someone, you wish him to live, if you hate him, you wish him to die.
      Once you have wished him to live, to wish him also to die, this is to be deluded.' (trans.
      Leslie, *Argument by Contradiction in Pre-Buddhist Reasoning*, p. 25).

86   *Xúnzǐ* 3.5.5:52.

辯者, 別殊類, 使不相害, 序異端, 使不相悖。

Disputants distinguish different categories to prevent their interfering with one another. They (arrange in succession =) keep separate incompatible doctrines to prevent their mutual contradiction.'[87]

Such contradictions, the disputant would no doubt have realized, may arise from the way the world is organized, or from the general conditions of the human being living in it:

惡人聞之可也, 惡己自聞之, 悖矣。

To hate it that others hear [the bell ring] is acceptable, to hate it that oneself is hearing it, is self-contradictory.[88]

But they clearly may also transcend the natural environment and refer to types of knowledge or belief, not only behaviors and actions. Witness for instance the following statements, which are only slightly less abstract than the earliest formulations of the law of non-contradiction in Ancient Greece or India:

臣聞沐者其心倒, 心倒者其言悖。今君不沐, 何言之悖也？

I have heard, that when one washes one's hair, one's heart is upside down, but when the heart is upside down, one's utterances are contradictory. Now if the lord is not washing his hair, why is it that his utterances are contradictory?[89]

無由接之患, 自以為智, 智必不接。今不接而自以為智, 悖。

The calamity that comes from being unable to apprehend them (the wise and the worthy) is that one regards oneself as wise, while those truly wise are necessarily not apprehended. Now, it is contradictory not to recognize those who are truly wise and yet to regard oneself as wise.[90]

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87   *Hánshī Wàizhuàn* 6.6a; Hightower, *Han shih wai chuan,* p. 196.
88   *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 24.3.4:7b; Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei,* p. 613.
89   *Hánshī Wàizhuàn* 10.3:2b; Hightower, *Han shih wai chuan,* p. 320.
90   *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 16.3.1:9b; Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei,* p. 382.

Secondly, it was clearly recognized that the usage of *bèi* entails some kind of metadiscourse on language in language, or even, as one might be tempted to translate *cí* 辭 in the following example from the *Lǔshì chūnqiū,* in linguistic propositions:[91]

夫辭者, 意之表也。鑒其表而棄其意、悖。

Now, propositions are the surface of ideas. To reflect the surface while discarding the corresponding ideas is self-contradictory.[92]

Moreover, the discourse on self-refutation was something to be *tested* against paradoxical propositions of the 'sophists', then current in the philosophical discourse:

「非而謁楹」,「有牛馬非馬也」, 此惑於用名以亂實者也。驗之名約, 以其所受悖其所辭, 則能禁之矣。[93]

The flying arrow does not pass the pillar, a white horse is not a horse – these are examples of errors in the use of names that disorder objects. If we test such cases against the agreed use of names and if we use 'what one accepts' to show that 'what one rejects' is fallacious, then we can exclude such statements.

And from here, the whole gamut of embedding statements of self-contradiction with the negative verb *bèi* into further negative operators – including, of course, *bèi* itself – took off:

公叔死, 公孫鞅西游秦, 秦孝公聽之, 秦果用彊, 魏果用弱, 非公叔痤之悖也, 魏王則悖也。夫悖者之患, 固以不悖為悖。

When Gōngshū [Zuò] died, Gōngsūn Yāng traveled west to Qín, where Duke Xiào of Qín heeded his advice. In fact, Qín used what is strong, and Wèi what is weak. It was not Gōngsūn Zuò who was incoherent, but the

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91   On sentencehood in Classical Chinese see Bosley, 'The Emergence of Concepts of a Sentence', pp. 209-229. For a useful historical overview of the treatment of 'sentencehood' in Ancient Chinese linguistics see also Guō and Xià, 'Zhōngguó gǔdài yǔyánxué 'jù' gāiniàn de yǎnjìn', pp. 35-42.

92   *Lǔshì chūnqiū* 18.4:15a; Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei,* p. 455.

93   *Xúnzǐ* 22.3.3:280; Knoblock, *Xunzi,* 3: p. 131.

king of Wèi who was incoherent. As a matter of fact, the wickedness of what is incoherent is to obstinately take what is not incoherent as what is coherent.[94]

Given this background, one marvels less at the seeming historical exceptionality of the confident manipulation of 'self-refutation' in the Later Mohists canons. Since the topic has been discussed in great detail elsewhere,[95] I merely cite the most important passages here, starting with the culmination of negation embedding in the following beautiful example, in which assertion is effected via double negation, which is in turn negated again. Notice that no less than *five* different lexemes historically incorporating the negative *pə- (非 *pə-(tə-)wuj, 誹 *pə-(tə-)wuj, 弗 *p[ə,u]-t, 不 *p[ə,u](-t), 誖 *Npp[ə,u]-t-s) are used in this passage:

> 非誹者誖, 說在弗非。不非己之誹也, 不非誹。非可非也, 不可非也, 是不非誹也。

> (Canon:) To reject denial is self-contradictory. Explained by: he does not reject it. (Explanation:) If he does not reject his own denial he does not reject denial. Whether his rejection is to be rejected or not, it amounts to not rejecting denial.[96]

If we were to translate this long string of *p-negative expressions in the 'explanations', taking into account the etymological connections transparent through the Old Chinese reconstruction cited below, rather than stylistically leveling them (as in Graham's rendering), we probably would have to say something like

> *pə(-tə-)wuj pə(-tə-)wuj ta-q N-pp[ə,u] t-s, l̥ot dzzə-q pu-t pə(-tə-)wuj. *pə pə(-tə-)wuj kə-q tə pə(-tə-)wuj laj-q, pə pə(-tə-)wuj pə(-tə-)wuj.

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94   *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 11.2.6:16b; cf. Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei,* p. 256. As Schwermann points out (p.c. 8.11.2013) one could even translate *bèi* as 'self-defeating' or even 'self-destructive' in this military context, and accordingly as 'self-(imposed) destruction' in the passage quoted from the *Lǚshì chūnqiū* (16.8) below.

95   Cf. Leslie, *Argument by Contradiction in Pre-Buddhist Reasoning*; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science.*

96   *Mòzǐ* 10.41:202 & 10.43:234 = *Mòjīng* B.79 in Graham trans. 1978: 453-453, accepting Zhāng Hǎipéng's 張海鵬 (1755-1816) and Sūn Yìràng's 孫詒讓 emendations of 誖 for 諄, and 知知 for 知之.

pə(tə-)wuj kkhaj-q pə(-tə-)wuj laj-q, pə kkhaj-q pə(-tə-)wuj laj-q, de-q pə pə(-tə-)wuj. pə(-tə-)wuj laj-q.

(Canon:) To hold (linguistic = 言⁹⁷) not-being not to be not is self-negating; the explanation lies in causing the not-being to be not. (Explanation) Not to hold one's own (linguistic) not-being to be not is something which can not be held to be not, whereby this amounts to not holding the not-being to be not.

The following, immediately adjacent passage adds a sixth *p-negative *fǒu* 否 (*pə-q), the 'strong' (non-cliticizable) version of 不, capable of forming self-standing predications or to act as the head of a modifier, and *wú* 無 (*ma), the standard existential negative:

知知之否之足用也誖, 說在無以也。論之, 非智無以也。

(Canon:) It is fallacious that the knowledge of whether one knows something or not is sufficient to act on. Explained by: lacking what distinguishes knowledge. (Explanation:) When we sort out one from the other, the non-knowledge lacks what distinguishes knowledge.⁹⁸

That *bèi* was construed as being coextensive with a negated verb of being is also clear from its explanatory juxtaposition with *bù rán* 不然 'to be not so':⁹⁹

假必誖, 說在不然。
假必非也而後假。狗假霍也, 猶氏霍也。

(Canon:) To loan-name is necessarily self-contradictory. Explained by: not being so of it. (Explanation:) What it is loan-named it necessarily is

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97 Since 非 and 誹 were, for all we know, completely homophonous in Old Chinese, the use of the 'speech'-classifier *yán* 言 would seem to work diacritically here, i.e. pointing to the non-being as a *linguistic* rather than an ontological 'real-world' category.

98 *Mòzǐ* 10.41:201 & 10.43: 224 = *Mòjīng* B.34 in Graham trans. 1978: 401-402, again accepting all emendations by Sūn Yìràng. For an excellent introduction to Later Mohist discussions of knowledge see Boltz and Schemmel, 'The Language of "Knowledge" and "Space" in the Later Mohist Canons', pp. 1-52.

99 *Mòzǐ* 10.41: 196 & 10.43:217 = *Mòjīng* B.8 in Graham trans. 1978: 358. On *rán* as a pro-predicate used to make truth claims in the *Mòzǐ* see Sòng, 'Xiān-Qín pànduàn jù lǐ de zhēnyǔ jù biǎozhèng'.

not, otherwise it would not be a loan-name. When a dog is loan-named as being a crane, it is as when one gives it the clan-name "Crane".

This last passage also shows that if the establishment of a special technical vocabulary is one of the possible criteria for the presence of philosophy,[100] the usage of such shorthand labels as 'crane' – barely understandable outside an esoteric context reflecting language use and reference – would help to dispel the suspicion that we are not dealing with 'philosophy' in such texts. As Robins has recently shown, the 'crane' mentioned here is a stock example of a borrowed personal name suggesting categorial identity where there is 'in fact' none. Thus, a person called by the clan-name *Crane* is not a long-necked member of the species *gruiformes* – a mismatch potentially eroding a theory of language based on differences between real world objects.[101]

Finally, we do find another technical term *fèi* 費 (OC *pʰut-s) for 'contradiction' in the *Mòzǐ*, which is either simply a phonetic loan or morphologically distinct, but very likely belongs to the same word-family as **N-pp[ə,u]-t-s. It occurs most clearly with this value in the following passage:

此言而非兼, 擇即取兼, 即此言行費也。

This is opposing inclusivity in word, but accepting it when choosing, and it amounts to words and deeds being contradictory.[102]

Although this usage of *fèi* is completely eclipsed by the many occurrences of the character denoting the key word in the prominent discourse on 'squandering' or 'lavishness of expenditure' in the *Mòzǐ*, it is clear that *fèi* is nothing but a variant of *bèi* from passages such as the following:

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100   Cf. Holenstein, 'Philosophie außerhalb Europas', pp. 67-68.

101   Robins, 'Names, Cranes and the Later Mohists', pp. 369-385.

102   *Mòzǐ jiāngǔ* 4.16:74; vgl. Leslie, *Argument by Contradiction in Pre-Buddhist Reasoning*, p. 19. As Sūn Yíràng's commentary points out, the Bì Yuán 畢沅 (1730-1797) and several later editions of the text have *fú* 拂 (OC *pʰut) in this passage, a word glossed as 'opposing, recalcitrant', and, indeed, 'contradictory (of words)', as for instance when Yán Shīgǔ 顏師古 (581-645) comments on the *Hànshū* (71: 3043) passage '論議無所拂' ('there was nothing *fú* in the discussions and disquisitions') with '言不相違戾也。拂音佛' ('to not mutually conflict in wording; [MC] *phjut is pronounced as *bjut'). If Yán's sound gloss had in fact an ancient source, the unexplained aspiration of *pʰut would be effectively removed.

子欲學子之子, 今學成矣, 戰而死, 而子慍, 而猶欲耀, 糴讎, 則慍也。豈
不費哉？。

> You wanted to have a son, who studies. Now that he has studied, he died
> in a battle, and you are angry, but this is as if you became angry because
> wanted to sell grain, and grain was bought in return. How would [such a
> behavior] not be contradictory?![103]

Here, the verb forming the core of the final rhetorical question is written as *fèi*
費, while the same phrase occurs as *qǐ bù bèi zāi* 豈不悖哉 in this chapter as
well as in four other passages of the text.[104] It may even be that Fèi Zhòng 費仲,
the name of the cruel minister of the last Shāng despot Zhòu 紂 dubbed 'the
terror of the world' (*tiān xià zhī bào rén* 天下之暴人) in the *Mòzǐ*[105] is nothing
but a posthumous 'evil name' (*è míng* 惡名)[106] alluding to the extremist behav-
ior of the 'negator of the mean'. All of this arguing via (etymological) negativity
fits well with the more general Mohist tendency towards a 'formalisation of
ethics', most forcefully epitomized in the following passage:

仁人以其取舍是非之理相告, 無故從有故也, 弗知從有知也, 無辭必服,
見善必遷, 何故相？

> Human beings equipped with humaneness, impart to each other the
> principles why they accept or reject something and why they consider
> something right or wrong. Having no reasons, one follows those who have
> reasons; not knowing something, one follows those who have knowledge;
> having nothing to propose, one necessarily obeys; seeing something
> good, one necessarily moves along. For what reason should there be
> partiality?[107]

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103   *Mòzǐ jiāngǔ* 13.49:286.

104   *Mòzǐ jiāngǔ* 13.49:284 and 5.19:91, 11.46:261, 12.47:268, 12.47:267. In these other passages,
         however, the meaning of *bèi* seems to have already broadened towards the evaluative
         semantics of 'deluded', 'deceptive' etc. discussed above.

105   *Mòzǐ jiāngǔ* 12.48:274, Mei, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*, p. 233.

106   Early Chinese practices of 'evil naming' are copiously reconstructed in Schwermann,
         'Schlechte Namen, Leserlenkung und Herrscherkritik in antiken chinesischen Texten',
         pp. 593-594.

107   Roetz, 'Die Pluralismus-Frage und der zhouzeitliche philosophische Diskurs', pp. 10-11,
         quoting *Mòzǐ* 9.39:182.

If, as Roetz points out, this upholding of a 'discursive principle of decision making' in an anti-Confucian polemic is undermined elsewhere in the Mohist endorsement of the principle of command as a prerequisite for the functioning of the state, we may either face different textual layers, or have an example of what is predicted by the argumentative theory of reasoning in current psychology,[108] namely that people tend to reason better in argumentative contexts and that reasoning in such contexts is especially biased towards self-confirmation.

Self-Contradiction and Pragmatic Preferences

Clearly, then, if we make the reflection on the logic of self-contradiction and its subtle manipulation via verbs expressing negation a decisive criterion for the existence of 'philosophy' in a given textual culture, Warring States China meets the claim. As it has hopefully become clear in the section above on "The role of non-contradiction in definitions of philosophy", the choice of such a criterion may be contested against the discrete definitions of 'philosophy' in 'the' West in the past, and it is certainly tainted by a long history of infelicitous East-West projections (see the section above on "Epistemological universalism *vs.* intercultural hermeneutics"). Typically, however, evidence such as is cited in the section on "The linguistic prehistory of *bèi* as a marker of self-contradiction" is nonchalantly set aside in the sinological literature, since it is perceived as unsystematic, somewhat *ad-hoc*, pragmatically tied to the realm of social or political efficacy, and consequently viewed as theoretically not terribly ambitious in comparison with the Greeks. In the European engagement with Chinese thought, this position has a prehistory which can be traced back even beyond Kant's explicit denial of the existence of Chinese philosophy, at least as far back as Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Fénelon (1651-1715).[109] The comparative poverty of evidence for a *systematic* discourse on self-contradiction outside the Mohist canons – a corpus of texts, moreover, without any serious reception history to speak of before its rediscovery and edition by Sūn Yíràng 孫詒讓 (1848-1908) during the late Qīng period – might indeed have something to do

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108   Sperber, 'An Evolutionary Perspective on Testimony and Argumentation', pp. 401-413; Mercier, 'On the Universality of Argumentative Reasoning', pp. 85-113; Mercier and Sperber, 'Why Do Humans Reason?', pp. 57-111.

109   For a meticulous reconstruction of the demise of Enlightenment sinophilia since the late 18th century see *Roetz, Mensch und Natur im alten China, pp.* 3-43; for an English summary Roetz, 'Philosophy in China?', pp. 49-65.

with rhetorical preferences and the anthropological settings of scholarly exchange and text production in Early China. As Harbsmeier has repeatedly pointed out, the *cultural* difference lies in the fact that despite a clear understanding of the concept of propositions, truth, and contradiction as a tool to prove it, the reticence of the scholars to publicly pursue those issues beyond what was necessary for their pragmatic needs was rather subdued. This is nicely captured in the following passage from the *Lǔshì chūnqiū*:

故君子之說也，足以言賢者之實、不肖者之充而已矣，足以喻治之所悖、亂之所由起而已矣, 足以知物之情、人之所獲以生而已矣。

Thus, the explanations of the gentleman are sufficient to discuss the truth of the worthy and the reality of the unworthy, but stop with that. They are sufficient to illustrate the factors that cause disruption of order and the causes from which disorder arises, but stop with that. They are sufficient to know the essential nature of things and what man must catch in order to live but stop with that.[110]

Martha Nussbaum, writing about the 'missing thought' in Chinese statements of the golden rule, i.e. the insight that 'many of the most important distinctions among human beings are the work of fortune, unconnected to humane desert',[111] says:

Of course it seems difficult to believe that the Chinese people did not have the thoughts that my Greek texts record. For, as Rousseau says, anyone who thinks is likely to come up with them. What seems to me plausible, however, is that such thoughts were not supported or affirmed in the public discourse of their society, and certainly not in the Confucian philosophical tradition.[112] Instead, a thought about the appropriateness and fixity of hierarchy is put forward, and this thought, like feudal ideas about rank, enters in, to impede the perception of a fully common

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110   *Lǔshì chūnqiū* 16.8.1a; Knoblock and Riegel, trans. *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, p. 400; cf. *Harbsmeier, Language and Logic*, p. 209, pp. 212-218.

111   Nussbaum, 'Golden Rule Arguments: A Missing Thought?', p. 9.

112   Here, I tend to think, Nussbaum underestimates the anti-traditional, non-hierarchichal, post-conventional, and pluralistic potential *within* Confucianism, on which see e.g. Roetz, 'Moralischer Fortschritt in Griechenland und China', pp. 123-151; Roetz, 'Tradition, Moderne, Traditionskritik', pp. 124-167; Roetz, 'Die Pluralismus-Frage und der zhouzeitliche philosophische Diskurs'; Roetz, 'Tradition und Traditionskritik in der antiken chinesischen Philosophie'.

humanity and the public articulation of the missing thought about fortune. I would like to know whether what I have just said is true, and whether there are examples of this missing thought in other parts of Chinese culture.[113]

Replacing Nussbaum's ethical discourse target with an epistemological one would result in a similar kind of uneasiness, I trust. While the kind of inconspicuous evidence presented for a self-reflective manipulation of self-contradiction above may well qualify as undermining the absence verdict *within* the same kind of 'culture', i.e. the production and consumption of written argumentative prose by certain intellectual strands of literate Warring States society, it may ultimately indeed be more rewarding to look for such evidence 'in other parts of Chinese culture', where consistent statements are made and evaluated *outside* what is traditionally labeled as the broader philosophical or political discourse.[114]

   More generally, one might also ask whether the presence or absence of specific textual evidence for particular types of argumentation, reasoning and logic are necessarily diagnostic of the non-appearance of some corresponding concepts, categories or ideas in a culture. Thus, the principles underlying the theorem we call 'Pythagorean' today, in reference to the fragmentary writings about the Samian mathematician, guru, and possible coiner of the term 'philosophy' alluded to above, may well have been recognized at least a thousand years earlier (mid 18th c. BC) during the Old Babylonian period in what is today Iraq. But the purpose of the cuneiform tablet (Plimpton 322) which serves as the main piece of evidence for this claim, encountered in most standard histories of early mathematics after Neugebauer (1935-37), was most certainly not some kind proof-oriented 'research mathematics' *avant la lettre*, which aimed at a generalized procedure to create Pythagorean number triplets. Rather, it seems, it represents the rough-and-ready 'Excel sheet' approach by an anonymous schoolmaster, who tried to reduce his calculation work in posing and checking students' exercises.[115] Conversely, even the most scientifically and observationally inclined Greek scholars are known to have sometimes made

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113   Nussbaum, 'Golden Rule Arguments: A Missing Thought?', pp. 12-13.
114   Based on his contribution entitled 'De-modernizing Chinese Logic' to the conference which led to this volume, Kurtz preliminarily identifies' education, law, canonical studies, and historiography, in addition to mathematics, astronomy 'and other domains of scientific inquiry' as promising hunting grounds for such inquiries. See Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*.
115   For an excellent discussion of the tablet text in question as well as the more general issue of the need to take into account the social and cultural setting of the production of such

egregious mistakes in their assessment of readily available evidence, prone to be labeled 'pre-logical' (Lévy-Bruhl), 'primitive' (Mauss) or 'undifferentiated/ collective' (Durkheim) in less homotopic ancient cultural settings.[116] Thus, Russell once sarcastically pointed out that 'Aristotle maintained that women have fewer teeth than men; although he was twice married, it never occurred to him to verify this statement by examining his wives' mouths.'[117]

How much weight would be carried, then, by the observation that there is apparently no explicit formulation of the principle of non-contradiction in, say, Sumerian or Akkadian?[118] It is hardly conceivable that a culture which had an early poetic genre featuring rhetorical techniques of dialectics and staged disputes by 'intellectuals' which culminate in a Neo-Assyrian state of affairs, where 'the ancient art of classifying values through opposition is pushed to the extreme, and argumentation is employed to sustain a proposition and its contrary',[119] would have been unaware of something like an elementary version of the *tertium non datur*. This becomes even less plausible against the background of a scientific tradition, which carried out arithmetic operations and astronomic calculations as complex as those carefully documented by Neugebauer and his successors, not to speak of a substantial, if orally-based surveyor's algebra.[120] The question remains, however, why no one in Mesopotamia or Babylonia, as far as we know, bothered to generalize it, to reflect *upon* it and to write it down.[121]

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texts see Robson, 'Neither Sherlock Holmes nor Babylon', pp. 167-206, summarizing all of the earlier literature.

116   Not to speak of the WEIRD (white, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) modern setting (cf. Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 'The Weirdest People in the World?', pp. 61-83, which is often tacitly assumed in such assessments.

117   Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society, p.* 17. Mayhew's careful demonstration that many other alleged errors in Aristotle's biology arise from sloppy readings and misunderstandings of the texts is mostly well taken. His argument that the strong prevalence of scurvy and osteomalacia in pregnant and lactating women would have led to higher rates of tooth loss and that Aristotle's remark is therefore observational after all, strikes me as somewhat strained. Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology*.

118   Gonzalo Rubio (Pennsylvania State U.), p.c., Oct 21, 2012; Christopher Woods (U. Chicago), p.c., Oct 28. 2013.

119   Ponchia, 'Debates and Rhetoric in Sumer', pp. 63-84, citing a series of earlier works by Herman Vanstiphout and Bengt Alster on Sumerian debate poetry (cf. Mercier, 'On the Universality of Argumentative Reasoning').

120   For a good overview and selected textual examples, see Høyrup, 'Algebra and Naive Geometry', pp. 27-69, pp. 262-354; Høyrup, *Lengths, Widths, Surfaces*.

121   And we should bear in mind that probably the majority of the known excavated cuneiform texts remain unpublished.

Given the sometimes clichéd view of the culture of philosophical debate and argumentation in early China outside the field of sinology, often coupled with dubious *longue durée* cultural consistency claims,[122] there may be still some room for exercises like the one presented on *bèi* above, of gathering even scattered textual evidence for a particular, if maybe uncommon, mode of thought or argumentation. Moreover, the recent observation that even the beliefs that our modern fellow human beings hold about personality traits common to members of a given culture are overwhelmingly stereotypes not significantly descriptive of the peoples they claim to describe,[123] i.e. the fact that '[c]orrespondence between perceived national character traits and the average levels of traits of individual members of each culture [is] found neither within nor across cultures',[124] should caution us against any swift generalizations[125] assigning *any* particular 'mentality'(or its lack) to a premodern culture or society as a whole.

Conclusion: The Irrelevance of Linguistic Types in Predicting Developments of Philosophical Thought

Attempts to link up the apparent disinterest of most Early Chinese texts in the formal side of argumentation, including self-contradiction, with the structure of 'the' Chinese language, rather than with socio-economical values and institutions within a particular historical setting, have a convoluted history within the field of sinology. Consciously or not, and with or without ethnocentric undercurrents, they tended to construct Chinese as a typological antipode of Indo-European languages since the 18th century,[126] and often built quite

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122   See Peng and Nisbett, 'Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning about Contradiction', pp. 741-54 for a characteristic recent example of such diachronic short-circuits with regard to the relationship between modern and early Chinese reasoning about contradictions. For an exceedingly useful review of the cross-cultural psychological literature in the same vein see Mercier, 'On the Universality of Argumentative Reasoning', who effectively debunks the arguments marshalled by Peng and Nisbett.

123   Terracino, Abdel-Khalek, Ádám et al., 'National Character Does Not Reflect Mean Personality Trait Levels in 49 Cultures', pp. 96-100.

124   Terracino et al., 'National Character Does Not Reflect Mean Personality Trait Levels in 49 Cultures', p. 99.

125   See on this theme Lloyd, *Demystifying mentalities*.

126   See for some of the historical backgrounds of these developments: Behr, 'Language Change in Premodern China', pp. 13-51; Behr, 'Role of Language in Early Chinese Constructions of Ethnic Identity', pp. 567-587.

elaborate theories upon those precarious foundations.[127] Instead of asking the question of how a particular communicative or anthropological setting in the largely lineage-based, hierarchical and overwhelmingly agrarian late bronze age society may have impeded a more sustained interest in certain forms of critical or logical discourse, back projections of later linguistic properties into Old Chinese, or worse, influences of the iconic-indexical components of the writing system are singled out as primary 'inhibiting' factors. However, Dubs was undoubtedly right to demote the role played by language for the observed differences, stressing that[128]

> ... we have no reason to seek in the Chinese language the cause of the failure of the Chinese to develop such philosophical systems as those of Plato or Spinoza. The Chinese language is capable of expressing whatever ideas are desired to be expressed.

One wonders, then, how he seems to have become less confident in this position a quarter of a century later, when he writes:[129]

> The conclusion appears inescapable that language has played a very large part in philosophy, and that the characteristics of Indo-European languages have been determinative in the formation and development of certain features in symbolic logic and in European philosophy, since thinking follows the patterns of speech and its grammar. How, then, can those who speak only Indo-European languages formulate a philosophy that will avail for non-Indo-European-speaking peoples?

The statement comes very close to Benvéniste's much-quoted adage, formulated during roughly the same period, that 'C'est ce qu'on peut dire, qui délimite et organise ce qu'on penser',[130] and that the system of Greek logic would

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127   For a good philosophical overview of those developments and their consequences in Western sinology see Roetz, 'Die chinesische Sprache und das chinesische Denken', pp. 9-37. Makeham, 'The Role of Masters Studies in the Early Formation of Chinese Philosophy', pp. 85-86, shows that late 19th c. Japanese and Chinese authors such as Matsumoto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎 (1869-1944), Liáng Qǐchāo 梁啟超 (1873-1925) and Liú Shīpéi 劉師培 (1884-1919) already operated with essentially the same language deterministic figure of thought.

128   Dubs, 'The Failure of the Chinese to Produce Philosophical Systems', p. 104.

129   Dubs, 'Y.R. Chao on Chinese Grammar and Logic', p. 188.

130   Benvéniste, 'Catégories de pensée et catégories de langue', pp. 419-429. We set aside, for the moment, the question of whether first order principles of logic are innate and thus not contingent upon abstraction on the basis of language specific competent speaker

ultimately rest upon the case system of Indo-European inflection. This is, in a sense, a category mistake confounding grammatical theses for philosophical ones, even if it may well be the case that the need to mark a certain logical distinction within the surface structure of a particular natural language grammar renders philosophical generalizations, which are made on the strength of a language which does not have such obligatory marking, somewhat uninteresting.[131] Much to his credit, Dubs identifies the idea that the presence of a copula would be 'inevitable for certain statements' as 'a myth arising out of Indo-European grammar'.[132] This 'myth' rests on the idea that languages with zero-copularization, i.e. languages in which identity between a subject and a predicate nominal is expressed without explicit marking by a semantically empty copular verb 'to be', are somehow deficient in developing a philosophical grammar, because they would fail to systematically distinguish between 'substance' and 'attribute', as well as to express abstractions arising out of their tension.[133] The underlying Heideggerian discomposure which nourished such claims during the first half of the 20th century, seems painfully unaware of the fact that at least one third of the languages in the world happily allows for such zero-constructions.[134] Against the background of the geographic distribution of zero copulas, to convincingly advance the linguistic side of the 'ontological difference' argument, it would be necessary to explain why syllogistically driven epistemology did not first and foremost develop in Western Africa and non-English speaking North-America – the two areas featuring the highest density of obligatory copula use in the world! Moreover, contrary to Dubs, Old Chinese *did* have copular verbs,[135] as do most of its Tibeto-Burman linguistic

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input during acquisition. For a provocative perspective on logic nativism, including a discussion of modern Chinese data, see Crain and Khlentzos, 'The Logic Instinct', pp. 30-65.

131   Cf. Mei Tsu-lin's sober discussion of four cases where towering figures of the analytic philosophy movement – e.g. Frege, Ryle and Strawson – overgeneralize statements made on the basis of English and German, which are logically not invalid, but trivial if viewed from the perspective of obligatory distinctions made in the grammar of modern Mandarin Chinese. See Mei, 'Chinese Grammar and the Linguistic Movement in Philosophy', pp. 463-492.

132   Dubs, 'Y.R. Chao on Chinese Grammar and Logic', p. 188.

133   For an extreme, if very learned example of this line of thought see the discussion of Chinese in Lohmann, 'Martin Heideggers ontologische Indifferenz und die Sprache', pp. 49-106.

134   Leon Stassen in the *World Atlas of Language Structures* shows that in 175 out of 386 languages (45.3%) such zero predication is possible, Pustet (*Copulas*, p. 71) has 41/131 (i.e. 31.2%) noncopularizing languages. See Stassen, 'Zero Copula for Predicate Nominals'.

135   See Behr, 'Morphological Notes on the Old Chinese Counterfactual', for further discussion. It would be possible to analyze *yě* 也 (*laj-q) as a copula in *most* of its early classical usages as well. For an interesting, if not entirely convincing attempt to do so, and to

relatives,[136] even if it is unclear at present whether some of them are inherited from common Sino-Tibetan.[137] And finally, in addition to several syntactic strategies to present explicit abstractions in Classical Chinese,[138] part of the functional load of the deverbal suffix *-n in early Old Chinese may well have been to derive abstract nouns.[139]

Conversely, the fact that the expression of self-contradiction in Old Chinese *etymologically* operates with a verb derived via agglutinative word formation from an underlying negative does obviously not entail that a non-isolating linguistic typology is a prerequisite for the possibility of formulating logically precise propositions. Most speakers during the later part of the Zhōu period, when derivational morphology was already rapidly obsolescing, were probably not even aware of the etymology. And when early medieval lexicographers began at least to take notice of the derivational properties of tone change left over from the earlier affixation processes,[140] they were facing such a farrago of half-genuine, half-petrified, half-analogically adjusted evidence, that they failed to establish any coherent system of the grammatical functions encoded by such derivations.[141] The importance of morphology in general has been grossly overrated in discussions of the expressive and analytical capacities of natural language.[142] This is largely due to the establishment of morphological typology in linguistics as part of an alterity discourse in 18th century Europe, which in turn was influenced by the rise of the European vernaculars against the Latinate literary dominance. But, as the well-known morphologist Wolfgang

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explain the replacement of Early Old Chinese preposed *wéi* 佳 ~ 惟 ~ 惟 ~ 維 copulas by nominal predicates marked by sentence final 也 as a result from intensified areal contact with Tibeto-Burman SOV languages, see Sòng, 'Gǔ Hànyǔ pànduànjù cíxù de lìshǐ yǎnbiàn', pp. 33-37.

136   See Hyslop, 'Some Comparative Notes on Tibeto-Burman Copulas' and Zhāng, 'Zàng-Miǎnyǔ xìcí de fēnbù yǔ láiyuán', pp. 19-27 for overviews.

137   Cf. Thurgood, 'The Sino-Tibetan Copula *wiy*', pp. 65-82, criticized in Zhāng, 'Zàng-Miǎnyǔ xìcí de fēnbù yǔ láiyuán', who thinks of the commonalities as areal contact and 'drift' phenomena.

138   Harbsmeier, 'Explicit Abstraction'.

139   Jīn, 'Hàn-Zàngyǔ de míngcí hòuzhuì *-n', pp. 43-48.

140   The now classical Western article on the topic is Downer, 'Derivation by tone-change in Classical Chinese', pp. 258-90; the most up to date study of the phenomenon, rich in textual examples, but less convincing in their theoretical analysis, is Sūn, *Hànyǔ biàndiào gòucí yánjiū*.

141   Cf. Branner, 'On Early Chinese Morphology and its Intellectual History', pp. 45-76. This chaotic state of affairs is, incidentally, a good argument against ideas that such reading variants are artificially concocted by the medieval exegetes and phonologists.

142   Haag, 'Der Ausdruck der Denkordnung im Chinesischen', pp. 1-25.

Klein concludes in his provocatively titled article 'Wozu braucht man eigentlich Flexionsmorphologie?' – 'Die Flexion ist für die menschliche Sprache entbehrlich'.[143]

Nothing should preclude us from using a set of statements in Classical Chinese defining, say, the famous discourse on the relationship between 'names' (*míng* 名) and 'realities' (*shí* 實)[144] in a reading of the *Κρατύλος*. Or from comparing the socio-political embedding of this discourse in Ancient China in an age of ethical crisis to the theological and social transformations, which gave rise to the literature on the 'crisis of discourse' in Middle Kingdom Egypt. Or, again, to the *Lamentations of Khakheperreseneb* of the 18th Dynasty (New Kingdom), where the author complains that the 'juste rapport des paroles au réel et révoquée' (*ḫt mty mdwt*) in his age of turmoil.[145] Maybe it would be even illuminating to know why the Chinese struggled so hard in distinguishing 'names' and 'realities', the latter etymologically objects which are 'solid matter', 'knots'[146], while the Egyptians, on the other hand, used one and the same word for the word 'word' (*mdw.t*) and for the word 'matter, affair', while, conversely the word with the literal meaning 'knot' (*ts*) was used for the concept 'statement, utterance'.[147] In any case, the precondition for comparative projects like that, it seems to me, would be to acknowledge that language, at the end of the day, is almost as much a problem for understanding intra-linguistically as it is cross-linguistically, and that literary Chinese was always just as adequate a medium as a language for science[148], as it was for philosophy.

143   Klein, 'Wozu braucht man eigentlich Flexionsmorphologie?', pp. 24-54.

144   On which see, minimally, Ptak, 'Einige linguistische Denkansätze im 22. Kapitel des Buches *Hsün Tzu*', pp. 145-154; Krušinskij = Крушинский. 'Имена и реали в древнекитайской логике и методологии' [Names and realities in Old Chinese logic and methodology], pp. 88-105; Makeham, 'Names, Actualities and the Emergence of Essentialist Theories of Naming in Classical Chinese Thought,' pp. 341-63; Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, pp. 51-66; Djamouri, 'Théorie de la "rectification des dénominations"', pp. 55-74; Roetz, 'Die chinesische Sprache und das chinesische Denken' and Javier Caramés Sánchez' 'Los significados de míng 名 y shí 實 durante el período de los Reinos Combatientes', pp. 2-21.

145   Coulon, 'La rhétorique et ses fictions', pp. 103-132. Thanks to Andréas Stauder (Basel/Paris) for bringing this text to my attention.

146   實 (OC *mə-lit) 'fruit; solid'; see for the word-family comprising, among others, *zhì* 質 (*t-lit) 'real, solid; quality' and *jié* 結 (*kllit) 'to form fruit, coagulate, form a knot, tie', Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese*, p. 90, p. 103.

147   Borghouts, 'Indigenous Egyptian Grammar', pp. 5-14.

148   Cf. Robinson and Needham, 'Literary Chinese as a language for science', pp. 95-198.

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