

Special Issue

On the Concepts of Contradiction and Unity of Opposites

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1. Contradiction

In Chinese language, the concept of contradiction first refers to the phenomena that people make the two things, which could not be the true things at the same time, as the true things at the same time, that is, to make two opposite and conflict opinions as the correct opinions at the same time. For example, there is a story in ancient China. It is said that a person is selling weapons on the street. He says that his spears could thorn through any thing at one time. Then he says that his shields can keep out any thing at another time. An onlooker asks him what would happen if he use your spear to thrown your shield. Then the person could not answer. (Note 1) This kind of phenomena are called contradiction in formal logic in Chinese language. From this example we can see that it is quite easy to make the phenomena of contradiction in the sense of formal logic, when people make the results of different processes of thinkings as the phenomena and matters to begin a new process of thinking. However it is a biological instinct of human beings, which human beings have got through the millions of evolution, to make the results of different processes of thinkings as the phenomena and matters to begin a new process of thinking. Therefore humans would go on making such mistakes of formal logic. One of the major ways to judge, resolve and correct such mistakes is to carry on the relative practices or experiments, e.g. to use the spear to thrown the shield like what would happened in the above example. This is the basic source of the proposition of the materialist dialectics that the practice and its effect is the sole standard or the sole criterion to test the truth, or to test which is the truth among many relevant propositions.

However, along with the development of philosophy, people found that there are universal contradictions and conflict both in the fields of human thinking and human societies, that is, it is a universal phenomenon that things and connotations are connected one another, different from one another, repelled one another, and interdependent one another, such as rightness and left side, front and behind, poorness and richness, goodness and badness, whiteness and blackness, maleness and femaleness, and etc. People could not grasp the objects without such opposites. Chinese philosophers call this phenomenon as contradiction or unity of opposites. Then the concept of contradiction or unity

of opposites become one of the core concepts in dialectics.

At the same time, people also discovered that it is a universal phenomenon that the people have got different or totally opposite pinions or viewpoints on the same thing or on the same phenomenon in the field of cognition, alongside with the fast development of the modern science and technology.

On contradiction by Chairman Mao Zedong has got the great influence in present China. His study on contradiction is the representative of Chinese scholars' study on contradiction. His detailed explanation on the universality and particularity of contradiction, and on the concrete analysis on the concrete issue, and on the principal contradiction and non-principal contradiction, and on the principal aspect of a contradiction and the secondary aspect of a contradiction, and the identity of opposite, and the struggle of opposite, and the antagonistic contradiction and the non-antagonistic contradiction, and the transformation of a contradiction, etc., have influenced greatly Chairman Mao Zedong himself and several generations of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, therefore have become the philosophical magic weapon to get their goals in the process of directing the Chinese revolution and construction.

However, here must be pointed out that *On contradiction* by Chairman Mao Zedong mainly explained in detail the objective dialectics. We must have a clear recognition about it.

2. Antimony

The study about the issue of antimony is a very important moment or a very important passing stage for the western circle of philosophy to put the phenomenon of contradiction into nutshell of contradiction.

It is Immanuel Kant who first summarized the universal phenomenon that people had different or opposite opinions on the same thing or on the same matter or on the same object as the antimony in the field of human cognition. He listed the four clear phenomena of antimony as the examples in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*. They are as follows:

“first conflict of the transcendental ideas: Thesis: The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space; Antithesis: The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space.”

“second conflict of the transcendental ideas: Thesis: Every composite substance in the world is made up of simple parts, and nothing anywhere exists save the simple or what is composed of the simple. Antithesis: No composite thing in the world is made up of simple parts, and there nowhere exists in the world anything simple”.

The third “conflict of the transcendental ideas: Thesis: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can one and all be devised. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom. Antithesis: There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature.”

The fourth “conflict of the transcendental ideas: Thesis: There belongs to the world, either as its part or

as its cause, a being that is absolutely necessary. Antithesis: An absolutely necessary being nowhere exists in the world, no does it exist outside the world as its cause.” (Note 2)

The concept of antimony put forward by Kant promoted the development of subjective dialectics greatly.

Though Kant tried to explicate the concrete reason why there appeared the phenomena of antimony in human subjective disposition, he did not explain clearly, that is, he could not make the professional philosophers to understand easily the concrete reason why there appeared the phenomena of antimony in human subjective disposition, to say nothing of the ordinary readers, because that Kant himself did not make clear the differentia of the subjective disposition, nor did he himself make clear why people had to put forward the question of what is being, nor did he himself make clear further the defects or shortcomings of Latin languages in human thinking and expression.

Actually the concrete reason for the appearance of the antimony in the human thinkings and expressions is that people make some results of previous thinkings, made by others or the thinkers themselves, as the phenomenon or the starting point of a new thinking, to begin a new process of thinking. This is a biological instinct of humans, which gained by humans through millions of years of evolution, as stated in the above sections and chapters. However, it is very easy to make mistakes in human logical thinkings, especially in some reasoning which contain many thinking moments, that is, which have to summarize many phenomena, or which have to make a quite abstract concept, or which contain too many recessive thinking moments. And humans will go on making such logical mistakes, because of the biological limits of each individual of human beings. Each individual could not think too much time for each process of thinking, and the memory of each individual is not strong and limited, each individual might make two opposite judges on the same thing or the same event, when he has to think some issues which contain many thinking moments, or when he has to make the results of the previous processes of his thinkings or the thinkings of the other people as the starting point of his new thinking. This is the fundamental and basic reason for each person not to be able to be the master of everything. It is the outstanding expression or indication that many scholars, who are very wise in their professions, are deceived in their daily life to buy some bad or fake goods, which happen quite often, and they are deceived in different cases in different practices in present China.

What is more that each individual has got different social and economical position from the others. Their economical interests are often conflicting and opposite to that of the others. It is common for them to make conflicting and opposite judgments on the same thing or event. For instance, the price of the increase of apples in the markets of the city of Xian, Shaanxi, China, recently has got two conflicting and opposite opinions. The consumers thought it is a bad thing, the producers thought it is a good thing.

Besides, people discovered gradually that people have to establish or form some concepts or ideas which have got opposite meanings, then people can express and explain clearly or grasp some real phenomena in objective or subjective world, e.g., being and nothing, positive and negative, right and

left, right and wrong, front and back, before and behind, up and down, etc., alongside with the developments of philosophy.

Kant also called the above phenomena as contradiction or antimony. However the contradiction or antimony called by Kant is different from the contradiction in the formal logic in the traditional Chinese philosophy. The concept of the contradiction in the formal logic in the traditional Chinese philosophy mainly refers to the difference between the expressions on the same thing or event, that is, to express the two opposite opinions or descriptions on the same thing or event, which could not be true at the same time. While Kant's concept of contradiction or antimony refers to the concept of contradiction or antimony which densely covered or pervade in the process of people's cognition, and is an important moment, or an important joint, or an important knob, or an important thinking stage, from which the concept of traditional concept of the contradiction or antimony is transformed into the concept of the dialectical contradiction or antimony which densely covered or pervade in the process of people's cognition.

3. Unity of Opposites

Unity of opposites refers to that people take opposites, that is, the other concepts, as their premise, in the process of expressing a thing or an event. The concept of the unity of opposites is a very important concept in the subjective dialectics. It refers to the facts that humans have to form or establish some concepts, which is different from the concept, which we would like to grasp, especially some other concepts which have got the same degree of abstraction, or the best is the concepts which have got the opposite contents, in order to limit or refine the concepts which we would like to grasp. For instance, we could not to grasp the concept of abstraction if we did not think out or put out the concepts of concrete. Another example is that we could not understand or grasp the concept of nation, if we would not had understood or grasped the concepts of country, or state, or individual person, or community, or population, or color of skin, religious believes, living customs, psychology, region, history, and etc.

Kant did not explain clearly the concrete reason for ordinary people, or even the professional philosophers to understand easily why people have to form or establish the opposite concepts or antimony at last. Hegel discovered that people have to establish the opposite concepts or the antimony in their thinkings, then they can think through some things, which exist in the objective and subjective world, in their subjective thinkings, through Hegel's further thinkings. Hegel mainly expounded the above things or matters or phenomena, and made the above things or matters or phenomena as the major contents of his studies and his expounding in his three books of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Logic* and *The Science of Logic*. Hegel called the above things or matters or phenomena as the phenomena of contradiction and unity of opposites.

Hegel mainly studied the phenomena that on what conditions that the opposite parts exist and the transformation between them. For instance, Hegel studied very much on the concepts of Being and nothing, quality and quantity, positive and negative, form and essence, general and particular, and on

certain conditions the above concepts can transform to their opposites, and etc. His studies on dialectics reached the highest stage and level at his age, and are the generalization and summation of human's study on the phenomena that the transformation of the opposites one another.

However just like what is stated in the above parts of this series of articles, Hegel did not reach his goal at last, for his reader were not made clear on the questions which he would like to answer, because he did not give a higher level of the cognition or definition of the concept of subjective disposition or Being.

In my opinion, the genus of dialectics is the thinking method. Alongside with the dialectics is the thinking method of mechanism. The thinking method of mechanism has the characteristics that it believes that nothing in the world is changeable. Anything is the same when it is discovered, no matter it is present or future, to say nothing of its nature. While the thinking method of dialectics has the characteristics that it believes everything in the world is changeable. They are different, connected, coexisted and expelled one another.

In my opinion, both the thinking method of mechanism and the thinking method of dialectics are useful and necessary for people to use. Both of them are the thinking method for humans to grasp the inevitable connections between different things and matters, and to grasp the laws of the social development and natural development. Without any of them, humans could not finish any subjective disposition on any object. For instance, humans could not grasp the law of natural evolution without dialectics. Without the thinking method of mechanism, humans could not grasp the present state of some things. For instance, we could not determine the speed of a car, if we did not assume that the earth was immovable. And we could not fix the number of the staff of a factory, if we did not assume that the existing staff of the factory were all alive.

4. Natural Dialectics

There are four existent forms of the present dialectics. They are natural dialectics, social dialectics, objective dialectics and subjective dialectics. When we make the existent forms of dialectics opposite against each other, the natural dialectics refers to the learning which deals with the existing state of all kinds of the things and matters of the natural world, including the human organs, and their functions, and the relations between them, and the changing of them, and their independence, their co-existence on each other, their transformation one another. At present, almost all the existent forms of the natural dialectics refers to all the existent forms of the natural science.

In ancient times, all the communities had got their the existent forms of the natural dialectics, so long as they acknowledged that there exists the changes in the world. For instance, it was one of the existent forms of the natural dialectics in the traditional Chinese culture to believe that there were five elements in the world as follows, the metals, the wood, the water, the fire and the soil. These five basic elements reinforce each other, or counteract each other.

In contemporary China, some scholars hold that the natural dialectics should include the general

methodology in discovering and remaking the nature. However, since we have here distinguished the natural dialectics from the subjective dialectics, and the natural dialectics is the learning which includes the methodology of studying the nature, therefore we had better to include the methodology of studying the natural sciences into the field of the natural dialectics.

5. Social Dialectics and Objective Dialectics

The contents of the concepts of the social dialectics and objective dialectics are the same. When they opposite to the concept of natural dialectics, they are called the social dialectics; when they opposite to the concept of subjective dialectics, they are called the objective dialectics.

When we distinguish the four existent forms of dialectics from each other, and make them opposite against one another, the social dialectics refers to the learning which connected with all the social relations and their changes, especially their differences, their interdependence, their transformation one another, etc., on a certain historical conditions. Subjective dialectics mainly studies the subjective disposition, and its language expressions. Therefore the social dialectics is also called objective dialectics.

The reason for us to call the learning of the social dialectics the objective dialectics is that the transformation of all the social relations is limited directly by the level of the development of productivity. Comparatively with the subjective dialectics and its language expression, objects of the objective dialectics, that is, the changes and developments of all kinds of social relations are limited by more factors or elements and much more direct. For instance, the appearance or emergence of feudal society is closely linked with the comparatively large scale of appearance or emergence and use of metal tools, especially with the iron tools and weapons. The appearance or emergence of the capitalist society is closely linked with the innovation and production of powder and steam engine, and, etc., and their usage in a large scale. Another example is that the reason for the congress of the United States to passed through the amended act that both male and female to have the same political rights in the year of 1919 is that the internal-combustion engines and the electric motors had been used universally, and the difference in physical power between the male and female had almost disappeared in almost every industry.

But comparatively speaking, the opposites and antithesis between different classes and strata in the human society are much more complex than that of the nature. It is because that each class and stratum are composed of many individuals. And each individual is different from the other individual in his experience, profession, physical strength, intelligence, interest, structure of knowledge, and etc. Therefore each individual may be different in opinions from the other persons on each historic event or on each historic person. But each representative or each leader or the group leaders of the classes and strata, in the human society, might have same opinions on each historic event or each historic person because their opinions on each historic event or each historic person are limited or defined by the same historical conditions or the same historical situation. Therefore their policy to each social phenomenon

might be the same. This is what the objective dialectics studies.

6. Subjective Dialectics

When we distinguish the four existent forms of dialectics from each other, and make them opposite against one another, the subjective dialectics refers to the learning which studies and expound the subjective disposition and its language expressions. The subjective disposition can also be called a philosophy about languages and a learning about the comparison about the degree of advances between different languages from one certain perspective, because that the languages are the objective expressing forms of the subjective dispositions.

The philosophical studies are different from the literary creation. What the literary creation pursues directly the ideal. The literary creation can imagine at will with a powerful and unconstrained and vigorous style that brains with talent. Just like a Chinese scholar said recently that a novel usually could have many reasonable ends, no one should say that end was right or wrong. The other people could only say that the end was good or not, or if it was in coincidence with their imaginations, or ideals, or hopes, etc. Therefore the literary creation is the most free one. While the philosophy can not be so free as the literary creation. What the philosophy pursues directly is the truth, and especially the absolute truth. The philosophy pursues directly one answer, which seems the most reasonable and the most logical one, and which in coincidence with the most important interests of some persons, to the same thing, or to the same matter, or to the same event. And the other people can say that the answer is right or not, or if it is correct or not, etc.

The absolute truth to the same thing, or to the same matter, or to the same event, can only be one at the same time, because the persons who do the practice can only choose one proposition, one judgement, one relative truth as the absolute truth at the same space and the same time, that is, in the same situation. And people have to choose one proposition, or one judgement, or one relative truth as the absolute truth, for they would like to achieve the greatest interests in one action because of their rational abilities, that is, for they can take all the relative factors into their considerations and choose one relative truth as the absolute truth.

The determination of each absolute truth has to go through a series of processes, e.g. proposition, judgement, relative truth and absolute truth. That is to say, each absolute truth is transformed from proposition, judgement and relative truth in the contemporary conditions of the space and the time. Each absolute truth is also a proposition, a judgement and a relative truth. And it can be transformed into the absolute truth only because of the limits and refinements of the persons who do the practice in the certain conditions of the space and the time. And the certain conditions of the space and the time refers to the historical conditions which the thinkers and the persons who do the practices and the most important interests of the thinkers and the persons who do the practices.

Therefore the development and existence of the philosophy is limited and refined by the development and existence of many factors of natural science, economics and politics, and etc. Certainly the

philosophical research is more free and flexible than that of natural science, social sciences, the thoughts of politics and laws, because the philosophy is the pure products of human mind. Therefore the distance between philosophy and the phenomena in the nature and society is farther than that the other forms of ideology, such as the natural science, the laws of society, politics, etc. The natural science, and the laws of society, and politics, etc., need connect the phenomena in the nature and society directly, and are restricted and conditioned by them. Their opposites are quite finite comparatively with the philosophy. While philosophy can transcend the existing phenomena in the nature and society, and imagine and describe some thing which do not exist, or people can not find the substantial existence in the real nature and society. It is because that people can make one concept be antagonistic or opposite to infinite concepts, and can do subjective fabrication. And the fabrication can be infinite. Therefore the objects or scope of the subjective dialects can also be infinite.

The globalization, which the world is undergoing, is the historical background for us to stress today that one of the functions of the subjective dialects is to express the relations between the thinking of humans and different languages, and to express the relations between languages and the other subjective and objective things, and to express that subjective dialects is a learning to compare and express the degree of advance of the languages. Along with the globalization in the field of economy, the legal and political system of the world will also undergo through the process of the globalization. And the languages, especially the official written languages, which serve the existence and development of the legal and political systems, will also undergo the process of the globalization. That is to say, only one dominant written language will be left or remained in the future, just like what happened after the First Emperor of Qin dynasty united the whole China in 221 B.C. It is the most core and kernel interests and the most important thing for each language community to make its written language as the dominant written language in the process of the unification of the official written language. Each language community have to try its best to make its written language to be the sole official written language. The language communities would have to undergo serious or violent conflicts, even wars, to achieve this goal. In order to achieve successfully and peacefully the end of the unification of the languages in the world, especially the official written languages, we have to summarize the good points and shortcomings of each language, which has a large spoken population, and choose or reform a language, which is easy to lean and remember, and which will get the most efficiency to express all kinds of cultural phenomena, from the perspective of philosophy or philosophical methodology, as the the official written language of the world. Actually it is a process which the world has to undergo inevitably. No matter what the mother tongue a person has got, no matter how much love a person has got of his mother tongue, no man, no language community could stop this event to happen in the front of the laws of the historic development. An over-estimation of one's ability must fall a failure. This is also one of the most important reasons why the circle of philosophy of the world began to denote much attention to the language philosophy from the 30th of 20 century. Each language community can only take the attitude of repairing the house before the rain

towards the event. They have to prepare the ways to deal with the situation, in order to try its best to protect as many interests of themselves as possible, but not to try to prevent its happening. This matter is connected with each person who is alive. Therefore it cannot be kept secret and it has to be discussed openly.

At the same time, alongside the development of artificial intelligence on the foundation of the fast development of computer manufacturing, people pay more and more attention to the facts that how humans think out a proposition, how humans reason, how humans carry out a reasoning from multi-perspective and multi-coordinated system and multi-strata, and how much influence a theory has got in guiding the practice of human beings. Therefore this issue will become a more and more important issue in the subjective dialectics, for the development of artificial intelligence need resolve the questions well and properly and as soon as possible.

Notes

Note 1. The Editing Group of The Commercial Press, Ciyuan, Peking: The Commercial Press, 1979, vol. p. 2225. [in Chinese]

Note 2. Immanuel Kant's Critique Of Pure Reason, Translated by Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1929, p. 396, A 427, B 455; p. 402, A 435, B 403; p. 409, A 445, B 473; p. 415, A 453, B 481.