

## **Circumventing the Logic and Limits of Representation: *Otherness* in East-West Approaches to Paradox**

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# Circumventing the Logic and Limits of Representation: *Otherness* in East-West Approaches to Paradox

Robert Chia and Ajit Nayak

## Abstract

Paradox has become a popular theme in management and organization studies. In this chapter contribution, we argue that paradox arises, not from our phenomenal experience, but from our efforts at conceptualizing it through the logic of comprehension dominating Western thought. We identify an Aristotelian-inspired '*Being*' ontology and a corresponding *representationalist epistemology* as the primary underlying cause of paradox in truth claims made on empirical observations. We draw on a Heraclitean-inspired tradition in the West, which resonates deeply with a traditional Oriental approach, to show how paradox may be circumnavigated through an alternative *logic of Otherness*. Underlying this alternative metaphysical outlook is an ontology of *Becoming* which takes flux and change as pervasive and inexorable. Language and logic are thus seen as futile attempts to fix the unfixable. Embracing a *Becoming* worldview of reality enables us to recognize the limits of logic and representation and to deal with the paradoxes associated with it by developing more nuanced and oblique modes of communication and responses. A *Becoming* world-view sensitizes us to a necessary *Otherness* always already immanent in representational truth claims.

**Keywords:** *Being*, *Becoming*, representationalist epistemology, *logic of Otherness*, veridical, falsidical, *tendencies*, in-one-anotherness

## Introduction

“Paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion” (Kierkegaard 1985: 37).

Paradox has become a popular theme in management and organization studies. It has been increasingly employed to understand and deal with the pluralities, conflicts, tensions and inconsistencies in management and organization theory and practice (Quinn and Cameron 1988, Poole and Van de Ven 1989, Lewis 2000, Smith and Lewis 2011, Lewis and Smith 2014). The term is used to refer to many organizational dualisms, dilemmas and competing demands regularly faced by decision-makers such as that between maximizing profit and improving social welfare, or the problem of ensuring control and maintaining flexibility, or whether to invest in exploration or exploitation, or whether behavior is attributable to structure or agency, and so on. In contrast to contingency theories that aimed to provide a variety of ‘if/then’ answers to competing tensions, a paradox approach ostensibly emphasizes an ‘both/and’ understanding of pluralities and contradictions in organizations (Lewis and Smith 2014). However, despite much progress in the organizational literature we argue that to better understand different types of paradoxes, there is still a need to dig deeper into their origins, the underlying generative ‘sources’ of paradoxes, and how they can be adequately resolved or overcome. Not all paradoxical situations are of the same genre, and not all can be easily resolved in the same manner.

In this chapter, we argue that the traditional approach to understanding organizational paradox is predicated upon an Aristotelian-inspired *Being* ontology and a corresponding representationalist epistemology that emphasizes fixed entities, distinct boundaries and secure pre-defined categories as the basis for interrogating reality. Organizational phenomena are deemed to be discrete, bounded, and self-identical and hence amenable to linguistic

representation and logical manipulation. Such a logic of representation has been vital for the progress of the inert physical sciences because the assumption of the fixity of phenomena immeasurably aids scientific analysis (Whitehead 1948). It justifies the creation of clear distinctions, enables systematic categorization, and facilitates deterministic causal attribution, and hence helps progress in the physical sciences. Yet, it is patently ill-equipped to deal with the realities of a dynamic, living and interminably fluxing *social* reality. The ‘cinematographic’ snapshots such static analyses produce are patently inadequate to capturing the fluidity of our lived experiences; they “falsify as well as omit” (James 1911: 79). Despite this problem of representation, we regularly mistake such impoverished abstractions for reality itself and the tendency to do so is the real cause of the apparently paradoxical nature of organizational situations.

To understand the root cause of paradox, we examine the entire spectrum that we might encounter and show how those discussed in management and organization studies are of the type that Quine (1962) calls ‘veridical’ and ‘falsidical’ paradoxes. Veridical paradoxes are paradoxes in which two or more situations may initially appear irreconcilable or contradictory. Yet, they can be subsequently shown to be coherent and logically plausible. The apparent contradiction is overcome once it is realized that the categories of thought relied upon to comprehend situations encountered are irretrievably ambiguous, inadequate or insecure. Falsidical paradoxes take the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* whereby when propositional statements are vigorously pursued logically to the end, its conclusion increasingly appears absurd or untenable. Falsidical paradoxes reveal how propositional statements and the oppositional categories they rely upon are dependent on unwarranted premises that inevitably render the conclusion arrived at incredible or absurd. It points to the problem of the inadequacy of language and logic to capture and represent reality.

The philosopher William James (1911: 50) observed that our reality is socially constructed from the “big blooming, buzzing, confusion” of lived experience through the intervening processes of naming, categorizing and conceptualizing using language and logic. He argued that in attempting to understand life through this logic of representation, however, we often betray the “fullness of the reality to be known” (James 1911: 78). For James as well as other process thinkers such as Henri Bergson (1911) and Alfred North Whitehead (1929), reality is interminably and inexorably fluxing and *Becoming* and the primary reason why paradox arises is because we persist in using this static, Aristotelian-inspired logic to fix and name an essentially unfixable and perpetually changing reality. Our ability to overcome and deal effectively with organizational paradoxes, therefore, can be substantially enhanced by revising our ontological commitment from one of *Being* to that of *Becoming*; one where ultimate reality is deemed to be relentlessly fluxing and changing interminable. From this alternative worldview, all efforts at conceptualization and categorization are understood to be acts of simplification; instrumental ways of dealing with an inherently intractable reality in order to aid comprehension and to make life liveable. All thinking is driven by a will-to-knowledge that generates countervailing tensions and hence paradox, as Kierkegaard (1985) noted.

One major consequence of revising our ontological commitment from *Being* to *Becoming*, is a heightened awareness of a hidden ‘cost’ involved in fixing, naming and representing reality; an awareness of an ‘absent’ *Other* ever-present in representational truth claims. It is an acute awareness of this absent *Other* that led ancient thinkers of paradox to nurture a proclivity for making seemingly paradoxical pronouncements; pronouncements that force formal logic to ‘groan’ under the weight of its own self-inflicted contradictions. This is how ancient philosophers, both East and West dealt with the limitations of logic and language. Heraclitus, with his many obscure pronouncements in the *Fragments* (in Robinson,

1968: 87-105) exemplifies this tendency in the West. In the East, a similar suspicion regarding the adequacy of language and logic to convey thought and sentiment, pervades the entire traditional Oriental outlook; words are taken lightly and paradoxical utterances is a deliberate strategy in human communication. Lao Tzu's paradoxical assertions in the *Tao Te Ching* (in Chan, 1963: 136-176) exemplifies this way of thinking. These paradoxical pronouncements are intended to stop us in our tracks and to make us pause to reconsider the possibility of a deeper meaning hidden amongst such assertions. Thus, instead of precision, clarity and logical argumentation, communication is invariably nuanced, suggestive and paradoxical; obliquity and allusions are preferred to direct logical assertions. Sensitivity to *Otherness*, the unspoken, the absent is a crucial feature of this approach. This is how the ancients, both East and West circumnavigated the problem of paradox.

## **Paradox in Management and Organization Studies**

Use of the term paradox in management and organization studies began in some earnest in the 1980s as a result of organizational scholars wrestling with “some of the most frustrating issues” facing researchers in organizational effectiveness (Cameron 1986: 540). Underlying this frustration was a paradigm and mindset that struggled to address the “simultaneous presence of incongruent and contradictory patterns” (Quinn and Cameron 1988: 2) in organizational life. A paradox perspective aimed to address this frustration by moving away from an ‘either/or’ form of reasoning towards a ‘both/and’ logic which accepted and even embraced the existence of opposites, contradictions and tensions in organizations. The core premise of a paradoxical perspective is an acceptance of the need to “live and thrive with tensions” (Lewis and Smith 2014: 129). Yet, as Poole and Van de Ven (1989:564) acknowledged, the paradoxes described in management are mostly construed in “the lay sense” and “are not, strictly speaking, logical paradoxes”.

In an important earlier contribution to the literature, organizational paradoxes were defined as “contradictory, *mutually exclusive elements* that are present and (that) operate equally at the same time.” (Cameron, 1986: 546, emphasis added). The mutually exclusive elements include ‘competing values’ that needed to be considered simultaneously by leaders in their decision-making. This earlier formulation was adopted and revised by Smith and Lewis (2011) who identified a myriad of categories for representing organizational paradoxes along a ‘competing values’ taxonomy that included a temporal dimension; thus, for them, a paradox comprise “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith and Lewis 2011: 382). Their definition emphasized the ‘simultaneous appearance’ of competing/conflicting elements as a key feature of paradox. Yet, the simultaneous appearance of two sets of competing values, two theoretical perspectives, two competing demands, or two conflicting choices does not necessarily mean a paradox exists; the situation may indeed be pluralistic but it is not inherently absurd or irrational.

Nevertheless, thus defined, organizational paradox refer more to competing demands, conflicting priorities and the tensions arising therefrom and less to logically irreconcilable propositional statements. There are attempts to nod towards the ‘logically absurd’ character of organizational paradox but this is followed by swiftly moving on to more pragmatic concerns. For example, Lewis (2000: 760-761) points out that the contradictory elements of a paradox “seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously.” By making this observation, Lewis displays an understanding of how inextricable logic and absurdity are from one another when dealing with paradox. She rightly acknowledges that “*formal logic parses phenomena into smaller and disparate pieces*” (Lewis 2000: 762, emphasis added) and notes that the either/or thinking associated with it, renders it incapable of dealing with paradox. Lewis further observed that “language feeds the tendency to

polarize” (Lewis 2000: 762), yet, this important insight remains unexplored in subsequent theoretical efforts. We maintain here that it is *this very tendency to polarize and parse phenomena into smaller and disparate pieces using logic and language that creates the contradictory tensions and hence paradoxes we subsequently encounter.*

The practice of parsing phenomena, we argue, entails the forcible ‘boxing’ of fluid phenomena into rigid pre-established categories using an Aristotelian-inspired IS/IS NOT structure of comprehension. An inevitable conceptual ‘strain’ accompanies such ‘boxing’ attempts. The attempt to define phenomena in terms of either/or generates a corresponding *neither/nor* countervailing force that becomes immanent in each of the categorical terms subsequently defined. This *neither/nor* intimates an inevitable incompleteness or *Otherness* in any attempt at definition and representation; meaning is never fully present and unambiguous in linguistic concepts and categories. Why this is the case will be explored further in this paper. Be that as it may, this *Otherness* creates an inner tension that ‘festers’ within logic itself to produce the paradox we subsequently encounter.

Despite Lewis’s (2000) earlier intuition about the problems associated with parsing phenomena and how language tends to polarize, there remains a tendency to do just that in the organizational paradox literature. Thus, Smith and Lewis (2011), for instance, themselves go on to parse organizational paradoxes into several ‘disparate categories’: learning paradox (between radical/incremental innovation, stability/change and old/new); belonging paradox (between individual/collective and homogeneity/distinction); organizing paradox (between collaboration/competition, empowerment/direction, routines/change, and control/flexibility); and performing paradoxes (between financial and social goals). The oppositional categories generated therefrom are by no means unequivocal and secure; collaboration and competition ‘infect’ one another because of this immanent *Otherness*. The same goes with polarized categories like individual/collective, radical/incremental, routine/change, and so on. These



terms are not self-identical and secure. Yet, the dominant impulse in the organizational paradox literature is to create evermore disparate and polarized categories to account for evermore missing aspects of organizational situations *ad infinitum*. For example, Smith (2014) analyzes the explore/exploit dilemma facing top management teams and breaks down the conflicting tensions observed into further sub-categories such as resource allocation, organizational design and product design and so on in order to examine the paradoxical tensions associated with these strategic aspects of decision-making. Similarly (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven 2013) examine the market/regulation tensions facing a privatized telecommunications company. They identify this tension as a paradoxical situation and go on to generate further oppositional categories including cooperate/compete, and explore/exploit to explain the predicaments face by managers in the company.

To summarize, for us organizational paradoxes are an outcome of theoretical attempts to linguistically fix, and logically parse an inexorably fluxing reality into ever-smaller, static and dichotomous categories. Our very attempt to do this, often retrospectively, creates the very dilemmas and paradoxes we subsequently encounter because of this tendency to polarize. Paradox is inextricable from the logic of representation. In order to appreciate how we can overcome this tendency to parse phenomena, and indeed, to circumnavigate the limits of language and representational logic, we first need to refine our understanding of paradox from that of conflicting tensions to one that emphasizes the absurd and the incredible.

### **Paradox as Absurd**

The linguistic origin of the word paradox derives from two Greek words *para* (beyond) and *doxa* (belief); a paradox, therefore, is one that is *incredible*, absurd or ‘beyond belief’. Note that, because it emphasizes going ‘beyond’ conventional belief, there is a hint of the *para*-digmatic nature of paradox so that a situation may well appear paradoxical to

someone but not to another from a different tradition, culture or epoch; there is a relative dimension in the experience of paradox. Notwithstanding this, Nicholas Rescher (2001: 6) maintains that a paradox arises when we meet an ‘aporetic cluster’, i.e. “a set of individually plausible propositions which is collectively inconsistent.” In other words, individually coherent propositions can collectively contradict one another when rigorously pursued to their logical conclusion. Similarly, Sainsbury (1988: 1) defines a paradox as “an apparently untenable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises.” The focus is on the word ‘apparent.’ In both these definitions, there is an emphasis on how individual propositions that are independently logical and coherent when combined together produces an untenable conclusion. Rescher (2001: 12) illustrates this with the Paradox of the Horns by the Greek Eubulides thus: 1) You have no horns; 2) If you have not lost something, you still have it; 3) You have not lost any horns; 4) Therefore you (still) have horns! Here proposition 4 appears to contradict proposition 1; what seems to be individually plausible and coherent propositions have inadvertently produced a seemingly absurd conclusion. Sainsbury (1988) provides a similar example involving the ‘heap paradox’: 1) A collection of one million grains of sand is a heap; 2) If a collection of  $n$  grains of sand is a heap, then so is a collection of  $n-1$  grains of sand; 3) Therefore a collection of one grain of sand is a heap! In these two examples, what seems very reasonable propositional statements when pursued logically, leads to an absurd or unbelievable outcome. Something about the hidden premises conspire to produce the absurd notion that a ‘collection of one grain of sand is a heap’ or that not having lost any horns means we still have horns. The emphasis throughout is IS (or HAVE in the case of horns) or IS NOT/HAVE NOT; a key principle of Aristotelian logic as we shall show. Both these examples show how logical propositions with their neatly defined distinctions and categories (i.e., collection/grain/heap; not lost horns/have horns) can fail when pursued rigorously to the end; a *reductio ad absurdum* situation.

The Horns and Heaps examples intimate an essential insecurity in our categorical distinctions and that the propositional statements deriving therefrom can easily become logically absurd hence paradoxical just because of that. Quine (1962: 84) defines a paradox as “a conclusion that at first sounds absurd, but that has an argument to sustain it.” He describes three types of paradoxes we can encounter: veridical, falsidical and antinomic. A veridical paradox describes a situation that is ultimately, logically unproblematic even though it may initially appear absurd. If a man claims that he is celebrating his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2016 at the age of 68, he might raise an eyebrow or two. It may seem quite unbelievable until we realize that being born on February 29<sup>th</sup> 1948, his birth ‘day’ only happens once every four years. In this case, the apparent paradox is resolved once we separate the category ‘age’ from the category ‘birthday.’ Veridical paradoxes, therefore, often arise from the ambiguities/overlaps/tensions surrounding the categories we created for ourselves to apprehend reality. It points to the problem of the security of our analytical categories, for example, the relatively arbitrary distinctions we draw between ‘radical’ and ‘incremental’ innovation, between ‘exploration’ and ‘exploitation’ and between ‘control’ and ‘flexibility’ in defining organizational paradoxes.

Falsidical paradoxes are those analogous to the ones identified by Rescher and Sainsbury; that is, the Horn and Heap paradoxes where logic appears to fail. Another more well-known falsidical paradox is that of Zeno’s arrow. For an arrow fired to reach its target, it will first have to travel half the distance to get there. Once it is half way toward the target, it must now travel the remaining half of the distance to reach the target. Each time the arrow traverses half of the remaining distance to reach the target, it must then travel the shorter remaining half of the distance, down to infinitely infinitesimal measurements. This would lead to the absurd conclusion that the arrow never actually reaches the target; an untenable conclusion which rests on conflating *dynamic movement*, which is indivisible, with the

*trajectory* of the arrow which is infinitesimally divisible (Bergson 1911: 120, Chia 1998: 351-354). Once again, like veridical paradoxes, falsidical paradoxes are derived from hidden false premises relating to the inadequacies and hence confusion surrounding logic and its categories; in this instance, conflating movement with trajectory. The difference between veridical and falsidical paradoxes is more a matter of the degree of ‘hiddenness’ of the false assumptions made and hence how ‘unbelievable’ they appear.

Finally, Quine’s ‘antinomies’ include those such as the Cretan liar paradox where the problem of self-reference creates an unresolvable dilemma as to whether to believe him or otherwise. Quine (1962: 88) calls this an *intractable* paradox that creates a genuine ‘crisis of thought.’ Such paradoxes are the kind of self-referential problems that can only be avoided through a profound change in our entire system of comprehension. In the less intractable cases of veridical and falsidical paradoxes, however, it points to a failure in the logic of representation and more specifically to the polarized categories we employ to interrogate reality. The challenge for organizational paradox scholars, therefore, is to consider, for example, polarized categories such as exploration and exploitation to be inextricably intertwined and thus to countenance seemingly ‘absurd’ statements such as ‘To exploit is to explore; to explore is to exploit’; this would strain our accepted conventions of what each category means but it would make us realize that these are OUR categories created for interrogating reality post-hoc.

In summary, a paradox is an absurd or untenable conclusion arrived at through the rigorous application of logic and linguistic categories to a situation apprehended. The conclusion may appear untenable because of an *oversight* regarding the security of such categories, or because of insufficient scrutiny of false assumptions made as in the case of veridical paradoxes and falsidical paradoxes respectively, or more fundamentally because of the failure of logic to deal with the question of self-reference as in the case of antinomies.

With the exception of antinomies, veridical and falsidical paradoxes, therefore, are more ‘apparently’ paradoxical and it is these apparently paradoxical ones that are regularly raised in the management and organization studies literature. But to understand this better we need to excavate the root cause of paradox; one intimately associated with a representational epistemology.

### **The Root Cause of Paradox: The Inadequacy of A Representationalist Epistemology**

In *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, Cohen and Nagel (Cohen and Nagel 1939: 73-74) restate two foundational laws of logical thought initially raised by Plato and subsequently reasserted in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*; firstly an ontological principle of identity and secondly an epistemological principle of non-contradiction. Ontologically the identity of a phenomenon A must be distinct and self-identical; “nothing can be both A and not A.” This assertion is made on the premise that reality is essentially stable and relatively unchanging hence its identity is unproblematic. It entails a commitment to an ontology of *Being*. A corollary of this ontological principle is the epistemological principle of non-contradiction; “no proposition can be both true and false.” For Aristotle, “it is impossible for anyone to suppose the same thing *is* and *is not*, as some imagine that Heraclitus says” (Aristotle 1933: 162) thereby emphasizing the principle of non-contradiction which underpins formal logic. These two fundamental principles of identity and non-contradiction justify the belief that language and linear logic are patently adequate to the task of accurately representing reality. They were resurrected after the Middle Ages and have since dominated modern Western thought and the classical sciences associated with it.

In *Science and the Modern World*, the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead notes that Newton’s first law of motion was underpinned by a then revolutionary

idea directly derived from these two foundational principles of thought; that of an ‘ideally isolated system’ (Whitehead 1948: 47). This idea of an ideally isolated system implies that things can be said to be fully present, ‘*here* in space and *here* in time’ (Whitehead 1948: 50); phenomena are deemed to be separable, locatable and identifiable and hence amenable to linguistic representation and logical analysis. Enlightenment thinkers henceforth conceive the world as comprising ‘a succession of instantaneous configurations of matter’ (Whitehead 1948: 51) so that each discrete aspect of reality could be systematically named, categorized and analyzed accordingly. This is the metaphysical outlook underpinning the ‘parsing of phenomena’ that Lewis (2000) observed to be fundamental to logical analyses. Through this metaphysical impulse, we are able to say with great confidence in propositional terms what a thing IS or IS NOT; this is ‘exploration’, that is ‘exploitation’; this is ‘individual’, that is ‘collective’; this is ‘market’, that is ‘regulation’, and so on. From this confidence in the certainty of identity and meaning we can then proceed to causal analysis and attribution to create proper verifiable knowledge. It is this approach to knowledge-creation that we call a ‘representationalist epistemology’ (Chia 1996).

The intellectual fixing and naming of things seduces us into mistaking our abstract representations for reality; a tendency that Whitehead (Whitehead 1948: 52) calls the ‘Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness’. For him this tendency is the true source of paradox: ‘*paradox only arises because we have mistaken our abstractions for reality*’ (Whitehead 1948: 56, emphasis added). Paradox, therefore, as Lewis (2000) rightly notes, arises *from our conceptual apprehension of phenomena and particularly in our attempts to name, categorize and attribute causal significance to our experiences using literal language and logic*. There is no paradox in reality itself; reality is simply ‘the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly’ (Whitehead 1948: 56). It is only when we attempt to linguistically fix this unfixable reality and to forcibly extract meaning from the flux of our otherwise meaningless

experiences that paradox emerges. Our ability to circumnavigate paradox is, therefore, predicated upon our ability to think beyond the linguistic impulse to fix and to categorize and create polar opposites; something widespread in much of the organizational paradox literature.

### ***A Logic of Otherness: Rethinking Paradox***

Most paradoxes, as we have argued, arise because of a conceptual oversight due to the confusion or conflation of categories, because of the intrinsic insecurity of neat oppositional categories, or because of inattention to false, hidden premises. In particular, the security of categories of thought employed to scrutinize our lived experiences are usually taken to be unproblematic because of an Aristotelian-inspired metaphysics of '*Being*'. A representationalist epistemology encourages the 'parsing of phenomena' into evermore 'disparate pieces' with the attendant contradictory tensions generated accompanying every such effort. This representationalist epistemology must therefore be challenged before the paradoxes generated therefrom can be circumvented. For this a revision of our ontological commitment from that of *Being* to one of *Becoming* is crucial.

An ontology of *Becoming* takes its point of departure from the fundamental belief that all of reality is perpetually in flux and changing inexorably so that the explanatory predicament we face is not how to account for *change*, but how to account for *stability*. How, if all the world is changing, is stability and hence predictability possible? Likewise, the existential problem confronting us is not so much how to *initiate* change, but how we manage to *fix* and *stabilize* an ephemeral reality in order to make life productive and livable. This is why language, logic and social practices play such a critical role in socially constructing reality. The idea of a socially constructed reality only makes real sense in the context of an ontology of *Becoming*. Our socio-linguistic acts of naming, categorizing, conceptualizing,

and indeed our material organizing actions and practices are practical ways of arresting, fixing and stabilizing this ephemeral reality in order to facilitate social and economic exchange and productive action. Language and logic are therefore vital instruments for the human species; practical ‘tools’ for dealing with an otherwise intractable and indeed unlivable reality. Workability, not representational truth claims, therefore, is the real object of using language and logic. They help us “*harness* perceptual reality in concepts in order to drive it better to our ends” (James 1911: 65). Yet, they are “secondary formations, inadequate, and only ministerial...they falsify as well as omit” (James 1911: 79). We need to be aware that to understand life through such concepts is to “arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits as if with scissors, and then immobilizing these in our logical herbarium” (James 1996: 244). Reality itself is ever-flowing and refuses to be ‘boxed up’ and contained by these neat categories. Indeed, “Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it” (James 1996: 212) and it is this ‘overflowing’ that constitutes the surplus *Other* generated by the very act of naming and categorizing.

Embracing this ontology of *Becoming* enables us to approach the problem of paradox differently from that conventionally adopted. From this worldview, each attempt at naming, categorization and representation is fundamentally and unavoidably an act of forcible arrestation; a violent intervening into the flux of lived experience and arbitrarily fixing selective aspects of it for the purpose of analytical scrutiny. It entails the *centering* (i.e., fixing and locating the phenomenon apprehended) and the *censoring* (i.e., delineating boundaries) of our fluid, raw experience in order to extract *sense* and meaning from it. A will-to-knowledge underpins this analytical practice of ‘parsing phenomena’ and it is this forcible act of categorization using binary opposites that creates internal tensions thereby generating the contradictory impulses contained therein. But why is this the case?



Naming, categorizing and conceptualizing operates through the making of an arbitrary ‘incision’ (Whitehead 1929: 58); a ‘cutting off’ process that simultaneously *includes* and *excludes*, elevates and suppresses, and in that very process denies important aspects of our lived experiences. Such a logical procedure is necessary to produce the “singleness of the object” (Cooper 1987: 408) in order to facilitate conceptual analysis. Yet, just by doing precisely that, it generates internal tensions because that which is excluded and henceforth suppressed, ignored or forgotten will not be denied expression. It remains an ‘absent’ presence that festers and eventually serves as the source of tension that produces the paradox we eventually encounter. There is an *Other* immanent in every logical structure of comprehension (Cooper 1983: 202) that irretrievably contaminates and compromises the security of our conceptual categories. This ‘*logic of Otherness*’ must be understood and embraced so that we can better circumnavigate paradox.

In a significant paper on organization theory entitled ‘Organization/Disorganization’, Robert Cooper (Cooper 1986: 328) explored the notion of ‘organization’, not as a discrete, isolatable and circumscribed entity, but as an ongoing act of forcible ordering. For Cooper, in its most fundamental sense, organization is simply the forceful ‘appropriation of order’ out of an indiscriminate flux that is reality; a primordial condition which he calls the “zero degree of organization” (Cooper, 1986: 321) or what William James (1996: 50) calls the “aboriginal sensible muchness” of raw experience. In forcibly extracting order out of this ‘chaos’ of raw, lived experience, however, any act of organizing (naming, categorizing, ordering) entails a degree of reduction. Organization, then, is a fundamental ontological process involving the forcible “producing and reproducing (of) *objects* through which a community or society can see or think itself” (Cooper 1987: 407). The function of organization, therefore, is to close off the threat of disorder by suppressing a ‘contaminating’ *Other* so that these isolatable objects of reality are conceptually presented as singular, discrete and self-identical and hence

amenable to functional manipulation. Yet, immanent in the apparent singularity of the object of apprehension is an *objection* to being forcibly sundered from its *Other*; “The object is that which *objects*” (Cooper 1987: 408) and it is this immanent *objection* to being made into an object of investigation that generates paradox.

A ‘*logic of Otherness*’ is immanent and hence ever-present in all efforts at fixing phenomena through logical analysis and representation. It constitutes the necessary *Other* of linear logic. Thus, “inasmuch as a screw is a nut without a hole... (and) a nut is a screw with a hole” the screw and nut complete each other through the “mediation of lacks and fills”; there is an “in-one-anotherness” of one with the other (Cooper (1983: 202-203). What Cooper points to is the inextricable intertwinement of a binary term with its other; that the two simultaneously co-define and *tend towards* one another and cannot be neatly separated and rendered isolatable. Thus polarized oppositional terms such as freedom/unfreedom, individual/collective, stability/change, control/flexibility, exploration/exploitation are each inextricably interdependent and ‘contaminate’ each other irretrievably and the denial of this ‘in-one-anotherness’ is the source of paradox. This *logic of Otherness* is discernible in the writings of some ancient philosophers in both East and West such as Heraclitus and Lao Tzu who use paradoxical pronouncements to deliberately blur these apparent clear-cut distinctions.

### **East-West Approaches to Dealing with Paradox**

The inadequacies and limitations of formal logic, language and reason to adequately represent lived experience, is something that a subsidiary process-based tradition in the West, exemplified by Heraclitean thought, is well aware of. It is therefore, to Heraclitus that we must first turn to understand the limits of language and logic and to appreciate the need for oblique and paradoxical utterances to convey meaning beyond literal representations. This

form of subtle word-play reflecting a *logic of Otherness* at work is much in evidence in Heraclitus's *Fragments*. For instance, fragment 5.37 says "If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it, for it is hard to find and difficult." Logically, this sentence is untenable for, if one is able to expect the unexpected, then the unexpected would no longer be the unexpected! The statement is logically absurd yet there is something about such pronouncements which nevertheless seem to intuitively make sense. Such oblique and paradoxical utterances serve as an antidote to linear logic in that it points to potential meaning lying beyond or in-between concepts and categories. This awareness of the *Other* pervades *Fragments*. Thus in fragment 5.26, he says "The path traced by the pen is straight and crooked," in fragment 5.45, "In opposition there is agreement, between unlikes, the fairest harmony," and in fragment 5.47 he maintains "Aggregates are wholes, yet not wholes; brought together, yet carried asunder" (in Robinson 1968: 95-97).

Heraclitus's many paradoxical utterances are part of an alternative tradition of understanding that sought to eschew the rigors of linear logic and literal representation. It is a mode of communication and comprehension that remains subsidiary to the dominance of Aristotelian linear logic. It displays awareness of the kind of *Otherness* immanent in logical assertions, but which is actively denied in formal logic. For Heraclitus, it is impossible to catch qualities or kinds of things without appreciating their passage and ongoing transformation. According to him the very existence of separate, individual things is a myth. What a thing A is, is the inexorable working-through of internally contested differences that are perpetually in tension; there is no possibility of a secure, stable, self-contained and self-identical entity that can be singularly examined in isolation without 'contamination'. Nothing is precisely what 'something' is at any given moment; thingness reflects a *tendency* rather than a full presence. It is merely the transitory phase of an ongoing internal strife. Far from affirming the principle of non-contradiction, for Heraclitus, contradiction is intrinsic to

identity. Things *Become* and in their becoming lies the ongoing working out of these internal strife. To think *Becoming*, therefore, is to think of A as always already a temporarily-stabilized effect of the relentless process of transformation. This is what a *logic of Otherness* alerts us to.

In the East, this appreciation of the limits of language and logic pervades the entire traditional Oriental outlook. Words are taken lightly and rarely literally; like Heraclitus, directionality and tendency are more important than final state. Unlike in alphabetic-literate cultures, where precision and clarity in meaning is “regarded as something altogether wholesome and altogether desirable” (Ong 1967: 47), communication in the East is often indirect, suggestive and symbolic (Abe 1990). Language, logic, concepts and categories constantly point to an absent and elusive *Other* lying beyond. There is “a deep-seated awareness of the incompetence of utterance as the (primary) mode of man’s being” (Nishitani 1982: 31). Hence communication is invariably nuanced, allusive and paradoxical; meaning is not taken to reside in words but is deemed to be the aggregative effect of minute and suggestive ‘differences that make a difference’ (Bateson 1972: 457). Chinese language, in particular, with its lack of morphology and syntax, differs substantially from the austere language and logic of the West. According to the sinologist Francois Jullien (2015: 18), to understand Chinese is to engage in “both what it says and what it does not say, both in what it engages and what it turns away from, in what it does and does not lead us to think.” In other words, it is about alertness to a dynamic *logic of Otherness*; an awareness of temporality, transience and tendencies rather than fixed states. Tendencies precede outcomes and a thing or a term is fundamentally an expression of a tendency rather than a solid, static entity or definable state. Thinking *Becoming* enables us to privilege the propensities and tendencies jointly at work in the formation of effects such as things and final states. Perhaps the most recognizable Oriental symbol of this immanent dynamism with its emphasis on tendencies,

reversals and in-one-anotherness is the Ying/Yang symbol ☯ which emphasizes the inexorable and relentless transformation of things and situations. More than anything else, what the symbol exemplifies is not fixed polarized states but emergent *tendencies* and propensities; directionality not condition is of paramount importance.

This emphasis on the *logic of Otherness* and dynamically evolving tendencies is also very evident in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. We find paradoxical pronouncements similar to that of the Heraclitean *Fragments* in it. The first few lines read: "The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name; The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth" (in Chan 1963: 139). Why is the named Tao, not the Tao? Why is the Nameless the 'origin'? Such paradoxical utterances allude to the debasement that takes place through the process of naming, categorizing and conceptualizing. 'Tao' and the 'origin' are nameless, i.e., paradoxically they cannot be named so that even the words 'Tao' or 'origin' betray that which they allude to; an 'originless origin'! Further on, (in Chan 1963: 140) we find the curious pronouncement: "When the people of the world know beauty as beauty; There arises the recognition of ugliness; When they all know the good as good; There arises the recognition of evil; Therefore, Being and Non-being produce each other." Here is a good example of *Otherness* and *tendency* towards; beauty only makes sense because of its opposite 'ugliness', each produce and co-define the other. So also with good/evil, Being/Non-being and this leads to the observation that "it is on its non-being that the utility of the utensil depends" (in Chan 1963: 145). In other words, without the empty 'negative' space formed by the shape of a utensil, it would be useless as a utensil. Only through a *logic of Otherness* can we appreciate the dynamism, in-one-anotherness and hence paradoxical tendency implied in such articulations.

What these examples, as with the Heraclitean fragments, show is the patent insecurity of the neat, rigid categories of thought that we regularly rely upon to interrogate reality. They

are secondary products of the forcible insertion made into an ever-flowing reality in order to extract meaning and sense. Yet, in so doing they generate an internal tension that becomes the source of the paradox we subsequently encounter. Thus, in contrast to the insistence on identity and non-contradiction required in formal logic, in Eastern paradoxical thinking, there is a preference to “circumnavigate an issue, tossing out subtle hints that permit only a careful listener to surmise where the unspoken core of the question lies” (van Bragt in Nishitani 1982: xl). Sensitivity to *Otherness*, to the implied, the unspoken, the absent is a crucial feature of this approach to transcending paradox. This oblique impulse is predicated upon a *Becoming* worldview that assumes change to be ever-present and inexorable and that ‘big things’ and clear distinctions emerge unceremoniously from small seemingly innocuous beginningless ‘beginnings’. Polarized terms such as market/regulation, freedom/unfreedom, exploration/exploitation, individual/collective, and organization/disorganization are not immaculate conceptions nor are they cast in stone; they come to be so through our struggles with language in the effort to give meaning to our experiences. The word ‘meaning’ alludes to the mathematical ‘mean’; the averaging out of the sense of a term through its continued usage and refinement so much so that these terms always already implicate their *Other*.

Like the inexorable process of ‘aging’ or the erosion of ice caps that happens almost imperceptibly, it implies relentless ‘silent transformation’ (Jullien 2011) rather than spectacular, episodic change. How things gradually accrete, coalesce and become what they are is the focus of attention, not final, definitive states nor ready-made categories of thought. To think in genuinely *Becoming* terms, therefore, is to think in terms of dynamically evolving differences, tendencies and propensities rather than in polarized categories and static states. Appreciating how distinctions emerge and evolve enables us to view paradox as symptoms of the inadequacies of a representationalist epistemology with its emphasis on fixed end-states

and clearly defined categories of thought, and hence to find more oblique and allusive ways of expressing the organizational predicaments encountered.

## **Conclusion**

Paradox is a byproduct of the passion of thought as Kierkegaard observed. It is a consequence of logical thought driven by its desire for knowledge and certainty. For all its impressive accomplishments in the physical sciences Aristotelian logic and systematic analysis is tested to its limits when it enters the social ‘sciences’ domain where it has to deal with a far more ephemeral and unstable social reality than in the physical sciences. The Aristotelian principles of self-identity and of non-contradiction with their IS/IS NOT structure of comprehension, is incapable of tracking the emergence and *Becoming* of lives, things, situations and events. Instead, all it is able to do is to generate evermore polarized categories to account for the minutiae of lived experiences. These oppositional terms do not do justice to our phenomenal experiences or the phenomena we encounter, yet we invariably confuse them for reality. This is when paradox occurs.

The widespread analytical practice of ‘parsing phenomena’ into disparate pieces to aid systemic analysis and causal attribution entails an arbitrary act of ‘cutting off’ our phenomenal experiences in a way that simultaneously includes and excludes and it is this very operation that creates the internal contradictory tensions we subsequently encounter. It generates an *Other*; an unaccounted excess or ‘overflow’ that is henceforth conveniently discarded. This overflowing *Other* is actively suppressed, surreptitiously overlooked, or denied in order to sustain the singularity of the object of analysis. Yet, despite its invisibility and apparent absence, it refuses to be ignored; it ‘festers’ like a deep wound and acts to ‘contaminates’ otherwise precise definitions and neat categorical distinctions. This is how paradox emerges; from within the bowels of logic itself.

Logical statements with their subject-predicate structure and rigid either/or polarizing categories are unable to accommodate that which constitutes the passage through which an end-state becomes what it is. It is unable to track underlying dynamic *tendencies* where traces of what was and what is to be has to be acknowledged to fully appreciate the becoming richness of life in general and organizational life in particular. All that it does is to generate evermore static categories. Each analytical distinction we make produces yet another set of internal tensions *ad infinitum*; tensions that appear as apparently paradoxical organizational situations. Organizational paradoxes, therefore, are our own academically-created dilemmas.

How can this problem be circumnavigated or partially overcome? The ancients like Heraclitus and Lao Tzu have resorted, not to making propositional statements, but to confusing subject-predicate structures and static either/or categories through their paradoxical utterances; this communicational strategy redirects attention to *tendencies* and to the inevitable in-one-anotherness of the terms employed rather than to identifiable end-states. Hence Heraclitus's observation, "changing it rests" (fragment 5.48 in Robinson 1968: 97) and Lao Tzu's insistence that "The greatest skills seems to be clumsy; The greatest eloquence seems to stutter" (in Chan 1963: 161). The skilled appear unskilled, the eloquent appears tongue-tied! Each tends towards the *Other*. Each category: a 'grain'/a 'heap'; the skilled/unskilled; the eloquent/tongue-tied; market/regulation; exploration/exploitation infect and impregnate one another. They refuse easy conceptual separation because they have been forcibly rent out of the same fabric of an ever-flowing reality; every full presence claimed depends on a necessary absence. This is why paradox exists and persists and why we need to take oppositional categories more lightly and more playfully.

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