HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 3: Mozi and Logic
Section 5: Argument Validity: Emphasis on Laws as Universal Syntactic Form

- Western term "argument" and Mozi's concept of 辯 *bian*[distinction] are both used to refer to disputations, quarrels, debates, and to a conception of the *source* of the disagreement. One is giving/accepting a proof, and the other is how to apply a distinction. Translation of 辯 *biàn*[distinction dispute] as "argument" invites misunderstanding—suggests that Mozi is theorizing about proof structure, validity, truth, premises and conclusions etc.
- The Western focus on proof consisting of sentences arranged in a structure broadens the emphasis on a law metaphor so laws become crucial in all thinking and knowing—including eventually science.
- Two basic "law-like"patterns
    - All cherries are red (All form)
    - If this is a cherry, then it is red (if-then form)
- Arguments (proofs) including valid and sound arguments are common in the Chinese classics, but the classical teachers did not teach a theory of proof structure. (There was no practice of distinguishing which sentences are premises and which the conclusion, of criticizing a series of such sentences as invalid, or of distinguishing between *valid* and *true*.

- Common INVALID form
    - All cherries are red
    - This is red
    - Therefore this is a cherry
- Laws = sentences in *All* or則[if-then] or → form
- You need a universal sentence (*all* or *no*) to get logic started
- Logic also deals with premises using *some* & *some not*, but validity is much harder to prove
- The emphasis on the metaphor of laws shifts from political (punishment) to the logically universal form: the *political authority* and *punishment* aspect of the metaphor blends with the *syntactic* structure—laws as universal commands.
- Rationalists (knowledge comes from *reason*) conclude that to know anything, you must know some universals (syntactic laws).
- We can characterize the Chinese notion of *constant dào*[path] as what a syntactic law describes or states.
- A law is an *all/no* sentence in some language, a *dao*[path] is a process in the natural world (would be what it is even if there were no language speaking beings)
- In China, the naturalist focus is on the process, not on the sentence.

- In the West, the emphasis on deductive demonstration makes ethical knowledge depend on finding some self-evident highest level moral law

- Ethics is a logical search for the first law/principle of morality - everything else should follow from that