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JOHN PERRY

## *Paradoxical Logic*

IN HIS interesting<sup>1</sup> essay "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism"<sup>1</sup> Erich Fromm contributes to a growing misconception of the nature of logic—a misconception which seems to be concomitant with attempts to write about Zen, but is very damaging to its understanding.

According to Fromm, logical rules, like linguistic conventions or mores, vary from culture to culture:

Just as most people assume that their language is "natural" and that other languages only use different words for the same things, they assume also that the rules which determine proper thinking, [*sic*] are natural and universal ones; that what is illogical in one cultural system is illogical in any other, because it conflicts with "natural" logic. A good example of this is the difference between Aristotelian and paradoxical logic. . . .

In opposition to Aristotelian logic is what one might call *paradoxical logic*, which assumes that A and non-A do not exclude each other as predicates of X. Paradoxical logic was predominant in Chinese and Indian thinking, in Heraclitus' philosophy, and then again under the name of dialectics in the thought of Hegel and Marx. The general principle of paradoxical logic has been clearly described in general terms by Lao-Tse: "Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical." And by Chuang-tzu: "That which is one is one. That which is not-one, is also one."<sup>2</sup>

What is damaging about this theory of so-called paradoxical logic is not the possibility of undermining logic: its foundations are firm, and, if anything, Zen is a testimony for the universality of what Fromm calls Aristotelian logic. The pernicious offspring of talking of paradoxical logic as if it existed is a mistaken notion of the kind of experience the paradoxes of Zen are trying to transmit or create.

Actually, the whole import of Zen paradoxes (and those of Heraclitus, Kant, and Hegel, though for different reasons) is dependent on the laws of contradiction and excluded middle. Let us examine, for a minute, what these paradoxes would mean to someone who comes from some culture where the so-called paradoxical logic prevails. When confronted with any

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960). Pp. viii + 180. \$4.00.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.

of the paradoxes of Zen, such persons would experience no confusion. Instead, they would not think the paradoxes paradoxical at all. If, as Fromm supposes, logic varies from culture to culture, what seems paradoxical in terms of our logic might not be paradoxical at all in terms of some other logic. But this is not the case. The paradoxes of Zen are every bit as much paradoxes to Orientals as they are to Westerners. If they are less surprised by them, it is because they are more used to them. Lao Tzu would not have said, "Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical" if he had been raised in a culture where paradoxical logic was valid. When paradoxes become logical they cease to be paradoxical. Anyone who is not struck by the paradoxical nature of statements such as "That which is one is one. That which is not-one, is also one" is not comprehending what is said, either superficially or profoundly. Further, if these paradoxes are to contribute to the experience of *satori* they must create this kind of confusion: a kind of confusion which would not be possible to one who thought in the paradoxical logic of which Fromm speaks.

Logic cannot vary from one culture to another any more than mathematics can. They are both based on tautologies, and that is the nature of their "truth." Of course, systems can be mistaken or they can be too narrow. They can be improved upon and broadened, as both the systems of Aristotle and Euclid, for example, have been. And logic as a special discipline may have developed ambiguously in some places, or the term "logic" may be used ambiguously by some philosophers, Hegel, for example. But by talking about different logics as if they are equally valid, or as if they both even exist, Fromm only further confuses the issue.

Since logic, like mathematics, is analytic and not synthetic, it only confuses the issue to speak of experience which is logical in one system and illogical in another. Fromm claims this difference is illustrated by reactions to the Freudian concept of ambivalence:

A good example is Freud's concept of ambivalence, which says that one can experience love and hate for the same person at the same time. This experience, which from the standpoint of paradoxical logic is quite "logical," does not make sense from the standpoint of Aristotelian logic. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult for most people to be aware of feelings of ambivalence. If they are aware of love, they can not be aware of hate—since it would be utterly non-sensical to have two contradictory feelings at the same time towards the same person.<sup>3</sup>

Fromm is probably perfectly correct in saying that it is difficult for most people to be aware of ambivalence. But he is putting the cart before the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

horse when he refers to the conditioning of Aristotelian logic as the cause of this. It would seem more reasonable, when we have a case of ambivalence in which one seems to have two mutually contradictory feelings at the same time toward the same person, to examine the feelings to see if they are actually contradictories, rather than to assume that Aristotelian logic is faulty. Fromm might be compared to someone who, when he reaches two different answers by counting a collection of objects in two different ways, rather than assuming he has made a mistake, decides he is living in a culture which has chosen arbitrarily to use a different set of mathematical rules than those under which he was counting.

The point Fromm should be trying to make is that logical rules, like rules of syntax, presuppose conceptual thought, and when Zen attempts to make us think with our stomachs, to use Suzuki's phrase, it must pose paradoxes that defy any kind of logic, for logic is the weave that holds the conceptual cloth together. Any paradoxical logic would lose the entire effect: it would be a greater hindrance to the Zen initiate than non-paradoxical logic.