Christoph Harbsmeier **Humor in ancient Chinese philosophy**

Man has been defined as the laughing animal.[1] He not only belongs to his culture, he may also react to his own culture—for example, by laughing at it. Indeed, he may laugh not only at his own culture, but even at himself.

The child emerges from a largely vegetating form of uncommunicative existence through the smile. It is in the smile that the young human shows his humaneness. It is through shared moments of intimate humorous exchanges that friendship and a deep understanding of other adults is achieved and cultivated: we do not feel we truly know a person with whom we have never shared an ineffable smile. We tend to attribute a fine sense of humor to people and peoples we intimately like, though not to all we distantly admire.[2]

Homer attributed humor and laughter even to the gods. The wit and humor of Heraclitus was important in pre-Socratic philosophy, and Socrates' subtle humor and irony has been justly celebrated by philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard in his work *Om begrebet ironi med stadigt hensyn til Socrates* (On the notion of irony with constant reference to Socrates) (Copenhagen, 1841). One is tempted to speculate: without the smiling distancing oneself from what one is saying, there is no Socratic philosophizing. Without the hilarious and provocative comic challenge from men like Aristophanes and the threat of plays like the *Clouds*, we might have had a less resilient and a less articulate human response from Socrates. And if Western philosophy essentially is no more than footnotes to Socrates' disciple Plato (as the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead would have us believe), the self-distancing smile may be somewhere close to the very root of all self-critical philosophizing in the West. But this sort of general philosophical speculation is not what I am concerned with here.

The task I have set for myself is at once more modest and more ambitious: it is more ambitious because I intend to venture into the treacherously unfamiliar terrain of ancient Chinese humorous sensibilities. But it is more modest in that I do not at this stage intend to draw large and general conclusions on humor and philosophy in China: I want to present and discuss some of the evidence I think I have found of humor among some ancient Chinese thinkers and in some ancient texts. The presentation will be quite as important as the discussion, because I want to invite the reader to make up his own mind on the evidence I present. I hope and trust that he will distrust my comments except insofar as they are essentially made redundant by the evidence I present for them.

David R. Knechtges writes in his useful article "Wit, Humor and Satire in Early Chinese Literature":

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If humor is difficult to find in Chinese literature as a whole, it becomes a nearly impossible task in the early period, particularly up to the end of the Han period.[3]

I shall concentrate on this "nearly impossible task."

Knechtges continues:

Part of the blame for the absence of humorous writing in the pre-Han periods has been placed on Confucian puritanism.[4]

Many things that are often the subject of humorous treatment—indecency and sex, for example—were seldom mentioned and if they were never in a frivolous way.[5]

Here it seems to me that Knechtges has focused on an important point: Jeffrey Hendersen, in *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), lists no less than 106 expressions for the male reproductive organ and 91 expressions for the vagina used in classical Greek times. Eric Partridge, in *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), shows that the public use of obscene words was as common in Elizabethan England as it was in Aristophanes' time.

By contrast, the literature of ancient China that has come down to us from the time before the fall of the Han dynasty is poor indeed in obscenities. The boisterously outspoken and unbuttoned homosexual eroticism and the free play of crude sexual innuendo in Plato's *Symposium* would have been quite unthinkable in the work of Plato's Chinese contemporaries. And the *Symposium* is not a subcultural text. *Lukios or the Ass*, which I am inclined to attribute to Lucian himself, celebrates a form of light-hearted humorous eroticism which has no obvious parallels in early China. Apuleius' version of the story, his *Golden Ass*, though nowhere near as subtly structured, was a well-known part of the humorous Western tradition. The teasing and often obscene humor of Catullus' love poetry is significantly absent in China. The fifty lightheartedly erotic letters attributed to Aristainetos and dating to the fifth century A.D. again have no literary parallel in Chinese epistolography up to the fifth century A.D.[6] An erotic encyclopedia like the classic, Freud-inspired *Bilder-Lexikon für Kulturgeschichte* (Wien/Leipzig: Verlag für Kulturforschung, 1928) in eight splendid volumes has no parallel in China for more reasons than one. We do seem to have a clear contrast here which deserves our attention.

Leaving aside this problem of obscenities, I propose to limit myself to the problem of humor and mainly to some ancient Chinese texts which we have got used to calling loosely 'philosophical'. After a brief survey of jesting in the *Analects*, I shall concentrate on that particular form of humor, the joke, and the *conte à rire*.

I am painfully aware that most of the *contes à rire* I here present in the form of dead written words do not make us laugh. Humorous sensibilities vary

from culture to culture. Jokes age very fast. Humor tends to be something quintessentially fleeting, evasive, ephemeral. Many a tale that can be made to work well when told with gusto and nerve will never get off the ground when deprived of the essential vitality of oral performance. Jokes are primarily and essentially an oral form. Only in exceptional cases do they retain their spirit when reduced to dead letters.

In any case, laughter is a subjective matter: "What the stupid laugh at the well-balanced will grieve at. What the madman delights in the talented man will be worried by."[7]

I. HUMOR IN THE *ANALECTS*

The *Analects*[8] describes Confucius as a man of wit and of humor.[9] It is hard to recognize this man from the *Analects* in the traditional commentaries or the modern histories of Chinese philosophy.

Take an example:

> The Master went to Wu Cheng. There he heard the sound of stringed instruments and singing. The Master broke into a smile and said: "Surely you don't need to use an ox-knife to kill a chicken!" (17.4)

The Han commentary expounds our passage with the appropriate stiff Confucian seriousness: "Why should one use a powerful method (*da dao*) to sort out a small matter?"

Zi You takes Confucius to be dead serious when he offers this somewhat cryptic objection:

> I remember once hearing you say: "A gentleman who has studied the Way will be all the tenderer towards his fellow-men; a commoner who has studied the Way will be all the easier to employ."

The suggestion is that on another occasion Confucius had advocated that even the humble man should cultivate the (noble) Way, and that the people in Wu Cheng should not be laughed at and mocked when they played dignified string instruments in their admittedly incongruous environment. But Confucius continues:

> "(Oh,) I was joking about this a moment ago that's all (*xi zhi er*)!" (17.4)[10]

Saying "I was just joking" may have been a convenient ploy to escape from an embarrassing objection. But the possibility of saying "I was just joking" makes it clear that Confucius might have been joking.

There is a subtle note of self-irony in this story which is the key to a proper understanding. Confucius had ambitious moral ideals and elaborate ritual preoccupations. And yet, in spite of all these aspirations, he found himself an itinerant teacher without the kingly and aristocratic political audience for which his teaching was designed. He was unable to help noble and powerful men to put that preaching into practice. One may surmise that he felt rather

like that incongruously decorous and dignified musician in Wu Cheng. Miao Fan, a Qing dynasty scholar, comments along these lines: "(Confucius) regretted that he could not lead a state of one thousand chariots. (He felt) like cutting a chicken with an ox-knife. He had no full scope for his talents" (ed. Liu Baonan, vol. 4, p. 52). I quite agree with Liu Baonan (1791–1855): "This profoundly gets hold of Confucius' idea" (*Ibid.*)

When Confucius asks a string of disciples about their ambitions, they all come up with reasonably respectable and proper ambitions. Only a certain Dian falls out of line:

"In late spring, after the spring clothes have been newly made, I should like, together with five or six adults and six or seven boys, to go bathing in the River Yi and enjoy the breeze on the Rain Altar, and then to go home chanting poetry."
The Master sighed and said: "I'm (all) in favour of Dian!" (11.26)

It seems to me that there is a sympathetic knowing smile hidden in this sigh. *Tan* 'sigh' and *xiao* 'smile' are certainly not incompatible. Is Confucius seriously suggesting that his highest ambition is to go swimming? The old commentary has an almost exhilaratingly jejune interpretation: "Confucius approved of Dian as knowing the seasons" (ed. Liu Baonan, vol. 3, p. 50). Are we to consider seriously that Confucius was concerned about the bathing season? This suggestion itself sounds rather like a joke.[11]

I, for one, take the following remark to be light-hearted:

Ji Wen Zi always thought three times before taking action.
When the Master was told of this he commented: "Twice is enough!" (5.20)

I admit that the old commentary takes a different line and tells us in all seriousness: "One does not have to go so far as to think three times" (ed. Liu Baonan, vol. 1, p. 134). But does Confucius literally believe that it matters whether you think twice instead of thrice? I can hardly imagine this. Having thought about it five times, I conclude that the *Analects* are pervasively characterized by a fine sense of subtle informality, friendship, and humor.[12] But perhaps I should have thought about it six times.

II. HUMOR IN THE *MENG ZI*

There is nothing of the informality, the subtle self-irony and the light-hearted jocularity of the *Analects* in the book of *Meng Zi.* Instead we find a highly moralistic form of humor. The stories I shall retail here are all well-known:

There was a man who kept stealing a chicken from his neighbor every single day.
Someone commented: "This is not the way of the gentleman."
"Don't be so harsh on me: I'll steal just one chicken every month for the coming year, all right?"[13]

Mencius tells his story with an all-too-obvious moralistic purpose. He illustrates the abstractness and absoluteness of a moral imperative with something that might make one smile, but never begins to be a joke. We can compare it to the Buddhist edifying jokes which are expertly presented by I. S. Gurevich and L. N. Men'shikov in *Baj ju czing, Sutra sta pritch* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1986), or to the German *Predigtmärlein*, humorous little anecdotes for use in sermons, as they are presented in Elfriede Moser-Rath, *Predigtmärlein der Barockzeit. Exempel, Sage, Schwank und Fabel in geistlichen Quellen des oberdeutschen Raumes* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964).

Here is another famous piece of this variety of moralistic humor:

Once upon a time there was a man of Song who pulled at his rice plants because he was worried about their failure to grow. Afterwards he went home, not realizing what he had done.

"I'm worn out today!" he told his family. "I have been helping the rice plants to grow."

His son ran out to take a look and found the plants all shrivelled up.[14]

The episode is contrived for a didactic purpose. There is none of the lighthearted felicitousness of a joke or of wit.

Even at his story-telling best, Mencius provokes only a smile of moral sympathy, the dignified smile of a parson:

A man from Qi had a wife and a concubine. Whenever he returned from an outing he smelt of wine and meat. His wife asked him whom he was eating and drinking with, and he replied: "Noble and rich people."

The wife told the concubine: "Whenever our husband returns he smells of meat and wine. I asked him whom he was dining with and he claimed they were all rich and noble people. On the other hand none of these distinguished personalities have ever shown themselves here. I'll have a look and see what our husband is up to."

Early in the morning she got up and followed her husband secretly. There was no one in the whole city who stopped to talk to her husband. In the end he went to a religious official and begged for left-overs. That was not enough for him and he turned round and went begging to someone else. This, it turned out, was his way of 'dining out'.

The wife returned home and told the concubine: "A husband is a person whom one looks up to. One places the hope of one's life in him. And now look at this!" Together with the concubine she mocked her husband as they stood in the courtyard and cried. The husband did not know about all this. Quietly, he came home and treated his wife and concubine with his customary arrogance.[15]

This story provokes the self-righteous moralistic smile of indignation and superiority. And in case one has not got the point, Mencius adds an explanation:

From the point of view of a gentleman it must be said that the ways in which man strives for riches, honor, profit and success are such that extremely few of their wives will fail to be ashamed of them and to shed tears on behalf of them.

This comment is more interesting for the moral sensibility it displays than for its sense for the form of humor we find in the story Mencius has just told us.

Mencius was a Confucian. Confucius most definitely was not. There was no Confucian standard for Confucius to live up to. Those who had the humorous sensibility of a Mencius imposed their interpretation upon their revered predecessors and were followed in general by Eastern and Western philologists and historians of philosophy.

III. HUMOR IN THE *XUN ZI*

The *Xun Zi* is, as far as I can see, totally devoid of any sense of humor whatsoever. The mood is serious and didactic throughout. Moreover, there is nothing light-hearted even in the poetic parts. Judging from the account of Confucian thinking in the *Xun Zi*, one would expect Confucius to have been a serenely dignified moralist sage.

The comparison with Aristotle is appropriate in our context. The systemic didacticism of Aristotle contrasts with the lively humor and irony of Socrates just as the dry didacticism of Xun Zi contrasts with the sensitive humor of Confucius. Intellectual creativity goes with humor, and ideological consolidation goes with dry didacticism. And yet the funny thing is that we sense more—not less—depth of moral seriousness in Socrates and in Confucius than in their more moralistically serious successors!

We might even be tempted to take humor more seriously than didacticism in both cases. We may resent it when, late in his life, Plato tries to enlist Socrates in dogmatic tours de force.

Let us look at some later Confucian sources.

IV. HUMOR IN THE *HAN SHI WAI ZHUAN* AND *SHUO YUAN*

In the Confucian compilation *Shuo Yuan*, Confucius himself is not safe from being introduced into what almost strikes us as a comic tale.[16] Neither is the Confucius of *Shuo Yuan* beyond answering certain kinds of questions with a witticism instead of a serious philosophical reply:

> Zi Gong asked Confucius: "Do the dead have knowledge or do they not have knowledge?"
>
> The Master said: "I might want to say that the dead have knowledge. But then I am afraid that filial sons and obedient grandsons will harm the living and send them to accompany the dead. I might want to say that the dead have no knowledge, but I am afraid that unfilial sons would abandon their parents and leave them unburied. You are not to understand whether the dead have knowledge or not. There is no hurry now. You will naturally come to know soon enough."[17]

Miscellaneous later collections do occasionally contain such Confucian wit. Very significantly, works like *Meng Zi* and *Xun Zi* do not. Could it be that the miscellaneous collections do preserve some material that is older than *Meng Zi*? One wonders.

The *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* is an early Han Confucian compilation, although it shows some interesting Taoist touches.[19] In the *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* we find a case of sarcastic wit. Sarcasm, of course, is not to be confused with humor, but there is an interesting relationship between these two things:

In the time of Duke Yi of Wei there was a minister named Hong Yin who received the order to go on a mission to another state. Before his return the Di barbarians attacked Wei. Duke Yi wished to raise an army to meet them, but his people with one accord said: "Those whom your Highness values and those who have high salaries and rank are cranes. What you love are your concubines. Go have your cranes and concubines fight! How do you expect us to fight?"[19]

V. HUMOR IN THE *YAN ZI CHUN QIU*

The *Yan Zi Chun Qiu* celebrates a tediously long-winded moralizing form of sarcasm:

Duke Jing ordered a servant to look after his favourite horse. Suddenly the beast died. The Duke got angry. He sent a man to fetch a sword to despatch the man who had been looking after the horse. At this time Yan Zi was present. When the attendant came in with the sword Yan Zi stopped him. . . .

He accused the man who had looked after the horse: "You are guilty of three things. The Duke has told you to look after the horse and you have killed it. This is your first crime. You have killed the horse which the Duke considered as his best. This is your second crime. You have caused the Duke to kill a person on account of one horse. This is your third crime. When the people hear of this they will be angry at their ruler. When the feudal lords hear it they think little of our state. By killing the Duke's horse you have caused the people to be full of resentment and our soldiers to be inferior to our neighbour's. You have committed three mortal crimes. I now commit you to prison."

The Duke heaved a deep sigh and said: "Set him free! Set him free! Stop hurting my humane sensibilities!"[20]

Yan Zi is also a master of humorous insult:

Yan Zi went as an ambassador to Chu. . . .

The King asked: "Are there no people in Qi?"

Yan Zi: "(The capital of Qi) Lin Zi contains as many as 300 boroughs. . . . How should there be no people?"

"How come, then, that you act as an ambassador?"[21]

When Yan Zi acts as an ambassador to Chu, the king of that country asks whether there are no people in Qi. For if there were any other people there, he suggests, Qi would surely have chosen someone 'bigger' than Yan Zi as ambassador. The logic of the king's rudeness may be summarized as follows:

1. Qi would only send something too insignificant to count as a man, like Yan Zi, if there were no people (of substance) in Qi.
2. Qi has sent someone as insignificant as Yan Zi.
3. Ergo: There cannot be people in Qi.

Of course, the king is not being serious. And neither is Yan Zi, when he replies along similarly insulting but strictly logical lines, expecting the ruler to grasp something like the following logical argument:

1. Qi sends to each country an ambassador who corresponds to the quality of that country's king.
2. Chu has the most untalented of kings.
3. Chu deserves the most untalented of ambassadors.
4. Yan Zi is the most untalented of ambassadors.
5. Ergo: Qi sends Yan Zi as an ambassador to Chu.

Yan Zi does not formally go through the motions of this argument. Here is how he very effectively delivers his logically exquisite piece of rudeness:

When the state of Qi assigns ambassadors it is in each case governed by certain considerations. The talented men are sent to serve as ambassadors to talented kings. The untalented men are sent to serve as ambassadors to untalented kings. I am the least talented. That is why they sent me straight to Chu.[22]

The insult becomes more effective by the fact that it is coupled with the obligatory ritual humility which takes on a sarcastic function, as when Yan Zi insists that he is the most untalented man in Qi. The humility, here as so often elsewhere, is ritual and sarcastic.

VI. HUMOR IN THE *ZHAN GUO CE*

If there is humor in the *Guo Yu*, it is in any case not obvious to the casual reader of the book. The *Zhan Guo Ce*, on the other hand, was clearly compiled by someone with a taste for the light humorous touch. The *Zhan Guo Ce* is written with narrative enthusiasm, whereas the *Guo Yu* has the archivist's ponderous style. The *Guo Yu* is written in a way that does not invite consecutive reading whereas *Zhan Guo Ce* is an intermittently entertaining text.

The persuasions of the *Zhan Guo Ce* involve tales like this:

A learned man from Song returned home after three years of study and called his mother by her personal given name.

The mother said: "You have been away on study for three years and now you come back and call me by my given name. Why do you behave like this?"

The son replied: "There is no one I regard as more talented than Yao and Shun, and still I call them by their given names. There is nothing I regard as larger than Heaven and Earth. But I call them by their given names. Now a mother is no more talented than Yao and Shun, and she is no grander than Heaven and Earth. Therefore I call my mother by her given name."[23]

This is perfect Confucian cultural logic, wonderfully outrageous. If one wants to understand the way logic entered the everyday lives of the ancient Chinese, this sort of evidence is invaluable.

A man from Wen was arrested by the Zhou border guards but declares himself to be a subject of the Zhou.

"You are not a Zhou citizen. How can you insist that you are not a foreigner?"

"From my youth I have recited the *Book of Songs*, and one song says:

Every place in the world
Is the King's land.
Anyone within the circling sea
Is the King's servant.[24]

Now Zhou rules the world and consequently I am the subject of Zhou. How could I count as a foreigner?"[25]

This passage is important in many ways. It clearly involves a deliberate comic misunderstanding of a canonical text. It pokes fun at honored tradition and state ritual. Moreover, there is an interesting logical train of thought here which may be expounded as follows:

1. I am within the circling sea.
2. Everyone within the circling sea is a Zhou subject.
3. Ergo: I am a Zhou subject.[26]

Consider the following passage, which is noted for its somewhat crude and rough realism:

A man from Wei was conducting a welcome ceremony for his bride. As the bride got into the carriage she asked: "These horses on the outside: whose are they, actually?"

"They're on loan," said the driver.

"Beat the outside horses! Don't beat the inside ones!" the bride urged the servant.

When the carriage arrived at the gate and was supported, as the ritual requires, by a lady of honor, she said: "Oh, put out the fire in the stove. We'll set the whole place on fire."

As she entered the hall and noticed a large bowl for the preparation of rice she said: "Oh, move this over there under the window, will you? This place is all cluttered up!"

The host laughed at this.[27]

We are not as likely to burst out laughing at this as those who appreciated the outrageousness of the bride's remarks. Fortunately for us the text comes to our rescue:

These three remarks are all perfectly pertinent. If none the less they are ridiculous that is because of the wrong timing."[28]

It may not have been acceptable to beat the horses one has borrowed, but it clearly was common practice.

The *Zhan Guo Ce* is rich in anecdotes that have entered Chinese proverbial lore:

A tiger was determined to devour all animals. At one point he caught a fox.
"Don't you dare eat me!" said the fox. "The Emperor of Heaven has put me in charge of all animals. If you eat me you will offend the ordinances of Heaven. If you think I'm lying, I'll go in front of you and you follow close behind. You'll see that all the animals, when they catch sight of me, will run for their lives."
The tiger thought that the fox had a point, and he went along with him. When the animals saw the two they all ran away.[29]

The text continues with one of those disastrously redundant explanations:

The tiger did not realize that the animals were afraid of him and not at all of the fox.[30]

This addition illustrates a point that has struck me again and again: the fact that ancient Chinese writers have a disastrous tendency to distrust their readers' quickness of wit and ability to grasp the point of a story. I call this distrust disastrous because it is the very atmosphere of ultimate trust in the reader's congenial wit that provides the social base for truly humorous literature.

VII. HUMOR IN THE *LÜ SHI CHUN QIU*

The *Guan Zi* and the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* are both highly heterogeneous compilations, but whereas I have yet to find anything at all that is humorous in the *Guan Zi*, the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* has its fair share of entertaining tales. For example, it tells us of that inevitably stupid 'man of Song':

In Song there lived a certain Cheng Zi who had lost a black dress and was looking for it in the street. When he met a woman wearing a black dress he caught hold of her and would not let her go. He was determined to take the dress off her. "You see: I lost a black dress."
"Sir, you may have lost your dress, but this is one that I have made for myself."
"Madam, you have better hand this one over to me. For the one that I have lost was a black dress with silk linings. Your dress has no linings at all. Surely, if you can get a dress with silk linings in exchange for one without any linings at all that's an excellent bargain!"[31]

The chancellor of Song is not immune to the proverbial imbecility of 'the man of Song':

The King of Song told his chancellor: "We have executed so many people, and yet the officials are showing less and less respect for me. Why is this?"
Chancellor Tang Yang replied: "The people you have been executing were all wicked. And since you punish the wicked ones, the good ones are not afraid of you. If you want them to fear you, you must from time to time arbitrarily kill someone irrespective of whether he is good or bad. Then the officials will fear you."
Not long after that the King of Song had Tang Yang executed.[32]

There is dry wit in the way this story is told. For once even the comment that is added does not spoil the fun:

As for Tang Yang's reply, it would have been better if he had made none.[33]

We also find in the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* a fine case of almost surrealist black humor:

Once upon a time there were two fearless men from Qi. One lived by the Eastern Wall, the other lived by the Western Wall. They met in the street and said: "Let's have a drink!"
After a few rounds they said: "How about getting some meat?"
Then they simply prepared a sauce, pulled out their daggers and started to carve into each other. They did not stop until they were dead.[34]

This story is again told with admirable economy. One can imagine the poker face of the storyteller. It does not take much imagination to see that this can have been a very good tale when effectively presented in the right surroundings.

As folklorists would expect, we find the inevitable stories of all sorts of people making fools of themselves.

A man from Chu dropped his sword into the water as he was being ferried across a river. He made a dent in the boat and said to himself: "This is where I dropped the sword."
When the ferry stopped on the other side of the river he dived into the water at the point indicated by the dent to look for his sword.[35]

The *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* delights in almost grotesque humor:

When Fan Wuzi fled from Jin a citizen got hold of his bell. He wanted to take it on his back and run away with it, but the bell was too heavy to carry. He tried to smash the bell with the clapper, but the bell gave a ringing sound. The thief, fearing that others might hear him, covered his ears with his hands.[36]

VIII. HUMOR IN THE *HAN FEI ZI*

Turning now to the so-called legalist tradition in China, we note first that the the *Shang Jun Shu* is quite uninterested in jokes throughout. The mood seems seriously expository and argumentative. The contrast with the *Han Fei Zi* on this point is striking. The *Han Fei Zi* is the most important single source we have of pre-Han jokes. There seems no doubt that the man Han Fei Zi had a keen sense of humor, which indeed permeates parts of his book. He even offers us stories like this one:

A man from Yan was free from all manner of misguided superstition, and yet he deliberately bathed in dog shit.
One day his wife had it off with a knight. It so happened that the husband returned home while they were at it, and the knight stormed out past him.
"Who is this guest?"
"What guest?"
"There has been no guest!" all his employees confirmed with one voice.

"You are so easily confused!" his wife exclaimed, and she washed him in dog shit to rid him of his hallucinations.[37]

Han Fei Zi was clearly fond of this story:

Li Ji from Yan was fond of long journeys. While he was away his wife had it off with a knight. When Ji unexpectedly arrived back and the knight was in the inner chambers, the wife was desperate about the situation.
A concubine advised: "Let this young gentleman rush out naked as he is, hair dishevelled and all. We shall just pretend that we do not see him."
The young gentleman followed this advice and rushed out through the door.
"Who was this?" asked Ji.
"Who was who?" everybody in the household asked back.
"Am I seeing ghosts?"
"Looks like it!"
"What shall we do?"
"Take the shit of our five domestic animals and wash yourself in it, that'll help!" his wife advised.
"So be it!" replied the husband, and he dutifully washed himself with the shit.[38]

Han Fei Zi adds the scholastically ethereal remark:

According to one source he bathed in orchid water.

As is so typical in popular jokes, the weaker party—the wife—cheats the stronger party—the husband. Moreover the pattern is repeated when the concubine, whose status is much lower than that of the wife, turns out to be the one who keeps a cool head and solves the problem.

In the *Han Fei Zi* one finds little social vignettes:

A husband and wife from Wei were offering their annual sacrificial invocations, and their prayer went thus: "May we be free from trouble, and may we gain one hundred rolls of cloth."
"Why pray for so little?" asked the husband.
"If we get more than this you'll get ideas in your head about purchasing a concubine, you see."[39]

There are also jokes straight from the absolutely standard repertory of international jocular folklore:

A certain Bu Zi from a province in Zheng told his wife to sew him a pair of trousers.
"How do you want them done, dear?"
"Like the old ones."
The wife went and tore up the new trousers until they looked like the old ones.[40]

What is special about Han Fei Zi is his insistence on poking fun at what—a long time ago—one might have called national Chinese characteristics:

Two men of Zheng quarrelled about who was the senior of the two.
"I'm as old as the Emperor Yao!" claimed one.
"I'm as old as the Yellow Emperor's elder brother!" claimed the other.

"The last one to stop arguing shall win the case!" pronounced the court which was unable to come to a reasoned legal decision.[41]

Here one is also invited to enjoy the surreal wisdom of the officer of the law.

The trust in external standards and authority comes in for this justly famous attack:

A man of Zheng wanted to buy sandals. He first measured his feet, but left the measuring strip on his sitting mat and went to the market without his measure. There he did find sandals, but he exclaimed: "Oh, I forgot to bring along the measure!" He returned home for the measure, but by the time he got back to the market the shops were closed and he did not get his sandals.

"Why didn't you try the sandals on your feet?" someone asked.

"I have more faith in the measure than in myself, you see!"[42]

Again the surely commended respect for and imitation of the old comes in for this concise comment:

A man from Lu was very proud of the justness of his ways.

When he saw that an old man sipping wine was unable to swallow it and spat it out again, our man from Lu dutifully did the same.[43]

Even the predilection for literary conceits and allusions is not safe from satirical attack:

A man from Chu was composing a letter to the Prime Minister of Yan. There was not enough light in his study, so he told the servant holding the lamp for him: "Lift the lamp!" As he was saying this he came to write down the characters for 'lift the lamp!' in the letter. Lifting the lamp was not part of the message in the letter. But when the Prime Minister of Yan received it he was very impressed: "'Lifting the lamp', that must be a poetic way of referring to 'esteeming the intelligent'!" he concluded. "And 'esteeming the intelligent' that means in concrete terms to raise the talented and employ them."

The Prime Minister told his King about this, and the King accepted the advice with pleasure. As a result the state was well-governed.[44]

Here Han Fei Zi adds a little comment which—as usual—spoils the fun for us by spelling out the moralistic intent:

Most of those people who employ learned men these days are like this King of Yan.[45]

But even after the joke is spoilt, what remains is a keen satire on the pomposity of scholarly pretense.

Naturally enough, the traditionalist bookishness of Han Fei Zi's age does not go unscathed:

"Gird yourself, restrain yourself" it said in a book. A man from Song who happened to be perusing this passage got hold of a heavy belt and tied himself up with it.

"What is this for?"

"The book tells us to do this. So obviously I comply!"[46]

The tremendous importance attached in ancient China to precedence and established practice comes in for a hilarious attack in the form of a little tale:

Once upon a time a man from Song was ploughing his field, and in his field there happened to be a stump of tree. Now it so happened that a hare had run into this tree stump, had broken its neck, and had died. The man from Song discarded his plough and kept watch by the tree stump, hoping to find more hares.[47]

Here again, as so often elsewhere, Han Fei Zi efficiently ruins the joke for us by spelling out the outcome:

Of course there were no more hares to be found and the man from Song became a laughing stock in his state.[48]

The fascination for virtuosity for its own sake, the admiration for the achievement of tasks just because they are difficult, is picked up in a story about a man carving a female ape onto the tip of a bramble thorn, where Han Fei Zi almost moves onto a Mencian plane of moralistic use of the comic.[49] He illustrates his disapproving attitude to hair-splitting sophistry with a comic exemplum. In a different place Han Fei Zi uses a similar *conte à rire* to make an entirely different point:

Once upon a time a man from Song used ivory to carve mulberry leaves for his ruler. After three years he had finished his job. The leaves were complete with wide stems and narrow branches. There were tiny buds and a varied sheen. If you were to throw it among real mulberry leaves it would be impossible to tell the difference.

The artisan was given public emoluments in Song on account of his achievement.

When Lie Zi heard about this he commented: "If Heaven and Earth took three years to make one branch, leaved things in this world would be few indeed!"[50]

Han Fei Zi adds this comment:

Therefore, if you do not avail yourself of the bounties of Heaven and Earth and start out from one person, if you do not follow the pattern of the Way but imitate just one man's wisdom, then you are one of those 'one-branch people'.[51]

Here we have the didactic use of comic material.

In the *Han Fei Zi* we even find what strikes us as strictly academic jokes:

Ni Yue was a specialist in dialectics from Song who was prepared to maintain against all the sophists of the Ji Xia academy of Wei that 'A white horse is not a horse'. When he was riding a white horse across a tax point he duly paid his horse duty.[52]

This is for those who take an interest in ancient Chinese dialectics. And in case the moral of the tale is not clear enough, Han Fei Zi adds an annotation:

Thus when it came to empty words in learned scriptures he could convince the whole world. But when it came to investigating facts and basing oneself on physical evidence he was unable to deceive a single man.

This, then, is not just academic folklore, it is a pointed attack, through the medium of a joke, on the practitioners of the art of dialectics in ancient China. We have a legalist or rather realist answer to Mencian jocular moralism.

IX. HUMOR IN THE *ZHUANG ZI*

Turning now to the Taoists, we find a striking contrast between the *Lao Zi*, which seems always dignified and profound, and the *Zhuang Zi*, which strikes many contrasting notes and shows a pervasive touch of humor that deserves a very detailed study in its own right. I intend to devote a special study to humor and irony in the *Zhuang Zi*. At this point I limit myself to recounting, for the sake of completeness of presentation, some instances of *contes à rire* in the *Zhuang Zi*:

A youth of Shouling in the state of Yan studied the proper way of walking in Handan, the capital of Zhao. He failed to learn the distinguished gait of Handan. Moreover he unlearned his original way of walking. So he came crawling back home on all fours.[53]

The lyricism and conciseness of this tale is impressive. We have a vivid comment which applies perfectly to modern higher education.

There is also a clear case of black humor in the *Zhuang Zi*:

A sacrificial priest clad in his black robe approached the pigsty for the sacrificial animals and addressed the swine as follows: "Why should you be afraid to die? I will feed you well for three months. Then I shall abstain from meat and alcohol for ten days, fast completely for three days, bed you on splendid white reeds, and in the end place your remains on distinguished sacrificial vessels. Won't you go along with that?"[54]

But the crucial point about Zhuang Zi is that in his book there is a pervasive touch of humor on the levels of style, imagery, and argumentation which deserve a detailed treatment.

X. HUI SHI'S SOPHISTICAL HUMOR

The Mohist Dialectical Chapters, translated and analyzed in A. C. Graham's monumental work *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (London and Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978), are dead serious, hard-headed, and analytical throughout. One never suspects the Later Mohist thinkers of any sense of humor whatsoever. Indeed, the whole book of *Mo Zi* shows a pedestrian style of earnestness both linguistically and stylistically that is quite inconsistent with light-hearted jocularity. The contrast with the sophists like Deng Xi, Hui Shi, and Gongsun Long is profound and evident.

Consider this story about the doyen of Chinese sophists:

A rich man from Zheng drowned and someone else found the dead body. The rich man's family asked to buy the dead body, but the finder demanded an exorbitant price. The rich man's family consulted Deng Xi, who said: "Don't worry: there is no one else who would want to buy the body."

The finder, on the other hand, got worried, and he too consulted Deng Xi. "Don't worry!" replied Deng Xi. "They cannot buy the dead body from anyone else, can they?"[55]

This is a joke directed at the legal profession of the time.[56]

Hui Shi's fondness for analogies was proverbial in ancient China, and in one story he defends his constant use of this method:

A client said to the King of Wei: "When Hui Shi talks about anything he is prone to use illustrative comparisons. If you forbid him illustrative comparisons he won't be able to speak."

The King agreed. At the audience the next day he said to Hui Shi: "When you speak about something I wish you would simply speak directly, without illustrative comparisons."

"Let's suppose we have a man who does not know what a *tan* is," Hui Shi said. "If he says 'what are the characteristics of a *tan* like?' and you answer 'Like a *tan*', will it be conveyed to him?"

"It will not."

"If you proceed to answer instead 'A *tan* in its characteristics is like a bow, but with a string made of bamboo', will he know?"

"It will be known."

"It is inherent in explanation that by using something he does know to convey what he does not know one causes the other man to know. To give up illustrative comparisons as you are telling me to do is inadmissible."

"Well said!" said the King.[57]

Hui Shi's puzzles are, of course, of great philosophical and scientific interest, but they are also constructed to be entertaining through their very outrageousness. Chapter 33 of the *Zhuang Zi* quotes a long series of sophist's paradoxes. Let us sample these to see in what sense they are evidence of Hui Shi's sense of humor.

The sky is as low as the earth! The mountains are level with the marshes!

However we explain this paradox, its interest arises from the fact that it is a very obviously untrue statement which the sophist claims he can demonstrate makes very good sense and is plainly true. Substantiating this claim is a kind of intellectual show, a piece of intellectual entertainment. Hui Shi promises logical stunts like the demonstration why "Linked rings can be disconnected!" Hui Shi delights in demonstrating to an amazed audience that:

"I know the centre of the World: it's north of Yan up in the north, and south of Yue down in the south! That's where you are!"

These paradoxes are logical/scientific riddles or puzzles. They are, as far as their entertainment purpose is concerned, very close to jokes. (Compare the jokes of the type: "What have X and Y in common? . . .") The fact that the

telling of these jokes involves insights of interest for the historian of science and argumentation is of no direct concern to us at this point except insofar as it demonstrates yet another way in which humor is close to the very root of creative and abstract scientific thinking.

The dialogues between the mystic Zhuang Zi and the sophist Hui Shi are among the more memorable pieces of ancient Chinese philosophical prose that have come down to us. Here is a well-worn example which exemplifies Hui Shi's spirit of logical analysis:

> Zhuang Zi and Hui Shi were strolling on the bridge above the Hao river.
> "Out swim the minnows, so free and easy!" said Zhuang Zi. "That's how fish are happy."
> "You are not a fish. Whence do you know that the fish are happy?"
> "You aren't me. Whence do you know that I don't know the fish are happy?"
> "We'll grant that not being you I don't know about you. You'll grant that you are not a fish, and that completes the case that you don't know the fish are happy."
> "Let's go back to where we started. When you said '*Whence* do you know that the fish are happy?', you asked me the question already knowing that I knew. I knew it from up above the Hao."[58]

Hui Shi's playful question "You are not a fish. How do you know that the fish are happy?" does raise a profound epistemological question which will not come as a surprise to any Western philosopher. To Zhuang Zi, on the other hand, and to most of his contemporaries, Hui Shi's question will have sounded quite hopelessly and comically pedantic. Hui Shi is playfully pedantic with his friend. Underlying his playfulness is a serious interest in scientific matters.

XI. HUMOR IN GONGSUN LONG

Gongsun Long went perhaps further than Hui Shi: he was something of a logical court jester at the court of the Lord of Pingyuan. In his case we not only have his outrageous logical teasers, such as the claim that *bai ma fei ma* 'a white horse is not a horse', we also have a crucial and fascinating document which tells us something about how the sophist went about demonstrating his deliberately outrageous paradox to be true. Gongsun Long became famous in his time as a logical stunt man.

Some scholars, notably Fung Yu-lan and Janusz Chmielewski, have read Gongsun Long's *White Horse Dialogue* as sustained serious logical discourse by a theoretician. Others, from earliest times onwards, have considered it as a facetious piece of sophistry. I believe that the *Dialogue* is both these things. I believe that Gongsun Long, as our earliest sources describe him, was indeed an intellectual entertainer at the court of the Lord of Pingyuan. At the same time, I note with pleasure that this playful logical entertainment is of crucial importance for this history of Chinese philosophy of language. After all: why does an intellectual activity absolutely have to be serious for us to take a serious interest in it, and for it to be of serious intellectual importance?

There were many entertainers at ancient Chinese courts displaying different skills or tricks. Gongsun Long was one of these. His trick, his piece of entertainment, was of an intellectual kind. His showpiece or standard ploy was to declare that he could prove that 'a white horse was not a horse'. He would declare that he could meet any objections anyone could raise against this thesis. By an extraordinary serendipity,[59] we still have a document that gives us quite a good idea of the arguments Gongsun Long was in the habit of using in defense of his thesis. I take the text we have today in the *White Horse Dialogue*[60] as a demonstration of the sort of sophists' dialogue that Gongsun Long would engage in.[61] In the *Dialogue*, Gongsun Long is supposed to defend successfully his plainly outrageous thesis against an opponent.

Gongsun Long's repertory was not limited to the thesis that a white horse is not a horse. Here is one of many other examples taken from a source roughly contemporary with Gongsun Long:

> Kong Chuan and Gongsun Long disputed at the palace of the Lord of Pingyuan. They spoke with profundity and rhetorical skill (*bian*). When they came to 'Zang has three ears', Gongsun Long propounded the thesis with great rhetorical skill. Kong Chuan failed to come up with an answer and left.
>
> The next day, when Kong Chuan came to court, the Lord of Pingyuan said to him: "What Gongsun Long said yesterday was presented with great rhetorical skill." Kong Chuan replied: "Yes. He almost managed to make Zang have three ears. He may have been skilful, but his case was a difficult one. May I ask you a question: That Zang has three ears is very hard to maintain, and it is that which is the wrong thesis. That Zang has two ears is very easy to maintain, and it is that which is the right thesis. Would you prefer to be right by taking the easy alternative or would you prefer to be wrong by taking the difficult alternative?"[62]

The *Zhuang Zi*, chapter 33, does quote a range of other outrageous theses which apparently were defended by sophists like Gongsun Long. A selection of these theses will give an impression, I think, of their entertaining purpose, although they can provide no direct hint of the logical arguments used to support them:

An egg has feathers.
A chicken has three legs.
A dog may be deemed to be a sheep.
A horse has eggs.
Fire is not hot.
A wheel does not touch the ground.
The eye does not see.
The shadow of a flying bird has never moved.
A white dog is black.
An orphan colt has never had a mother.
A stick one foot long, if you take away a half every day, will not be exhausted for a myriad ages.

All these theses enter naturally into jocular entertainments of the form:

"Do you know why an egg has feathers?"
"No."
"Ah, you see. . . ."

and the like. They are provocative introductions to a piece of logical entertainment the probable nature about which it is entertaining to speculate. Fortunately we do know something about why 'a white horse is not a horse', but we shall probably never know why 'a white dog is black'. There probably was a good logical story here, but we have no easy means of reconstructing it.

When it comes to the stick one foot long which is halved every day but will not be exhausted in a myriad ages, we do not know either, but we are sorely tempted to turn to paradoxes of infinity in ancient Greece, which provide extraordinarily plausible parallels: it seems that in their keenness to provide logical jokes the ancient Chinese logicians spelled out logical discoveries that turned out to be of crucial importance for the history of science and mathematics in the West.

Saying that the *White Horse Dialogue* and the other dialogues in which sophists like Gongsun Long must have specialized belong to a tradition of light-hearted entertainment is not to imply that they are devoid of serious logical interest. For in the *Dialogue*, Gongsun Long shows a considerable interest in problems which we are inclined to say belong properly to the philosophy of language. Gongsun Long was not necessarily as seriously interested in logical problems as the Later Mohists were, but this does not necessarily mean that he was logically less creative and original.

XII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have drawn attention to the sharp difference in intellectual mode between the *Lun Yu* and the *Meng Zi*, and between the *Xun Zi* on the one hand and the *Shuo Yuan* as well as the *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* on the other. Again I have pointed out a very clear difference in intellectual mode between the *Shang Jun Shu* and the *Han Fei Zi*, between the *Guo Yu* and the *Zhan Guo Ce*, between the *Lao Zi* and the *Zhuang Zi*, between the *Mo Jing* and the *Gongsun Long Zi*. Of course, there are ideological and stylistic as well as grammatical differences between these texts. But the point that I have tried to concentrate on is one not of ideology but of mentality, not of grammatical style but of intellectual and humorous sensibility. Using the example of humorous tales, I have tried to explore what I loosely call the humorous sensibilities in early Chinese texts, the light and light-hearted narrative touch. In so doing, I have followed the tradition of Sima Qian (circa 145–86), who found it appropriate to include in his *Shi Ji* a whole subsection on jesters (*Gu Ji Zhuan*).[63] I can also appeal to the precedent of Liu Xie (465–522), who had a section on humor in his Wen Xin Diao Long (*Xie Yin*, "Humor and Enigma"),[64] in which he characteristically rejected nonmoralistic light-hearted humor.

I can most vividly imagine that many a thoughtful reader will somberly reflect that the present inevitably subjective essay fully bears out Professor Knechtges' statement concerning the 'nearly impossible task' of finding humor in the pre-Han literature with which I started out. This is not surprising, since Professor Knechtges is very seldom wrong. Nothing that I have quoted strikes me as uproariously funny in our day and age. Woody Allen may safely disregard ancient Chinese literature as a source for jokes that are effective in our impatient, overstimulated, and breathless age.

The question that remains, however, is whether we, as students of ancient Chinese thought, can afford to continue disregarding the humorous sensibilities in ancient Chinese thinkers. Let me confess that it matters to me, personally, whether Confucius, Zhuang Zi, Han Fei Zi, Gongsun Long, and perhaps Hui Shi had anything like humorous sensibilities. The laughing sensibilities of a person, and of a people, happen to make a tremendous difference to me, personally. Tell me what kinds of things people laugh at, and I shall tell you what kind of people they are! Until we learn to smile with the ancient Chinese, I am inclined to say, we have not, truly, even begun to misunderstand them properly—not to speak of understanding them properly, which may in any case be quite impossible.

NOTES

1. Pseudo-Aristotle, *De partibus animalium* 673a8 and 673a28.

2. Cf. C. Harbsmeier, "Some Preliminary Notes on Chinese Jokes and Cartoons," in K. Brodsgaard and B. Arendrup, eds., *China in the Eighties and Beyond* (London: Curzon Press, 1986).

3. D. R. Knechtges, "Wit, Humor, and Satire in Early Chinese Literature (to A.D. 220)," *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1971): 81.

4. Ibid., p. 82.

5. Ibid.

6. The history of Chinese epistolography is indeed an important subject to be studied in a historical and comparative perspective.

7. *Xin Xu* 9.7, ed. Lu Yuanjun, p. 299.

8. All unmarked references in this piece are to the *Analects* according to the numbering in D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects*, bilingual edition (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1984).

9. Cf. Lin Yutang, *Lun Kong Zi de Youmo* (Taipei: Jinlan Wenhua Chuban She, 1984), and C. Harbsmeier, "*Confucius Ridens*: Humour in the *Analects*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, forthcoming.

10. For a report on an earlier joke by Cheng Wang of the Zhou dynasty see *Shi Ji* 39, ed. Takigawa, p. 3.

11. The Dunhuang Manuscript, Stein no. 610 entitled *Qi Yan Lu* (The Book of Smiles), which was written down in 723 A.D., contains evidence that the Chinese continued to build jokes on this passage. A certain Shi Dongyong claims to know that thirty of Confucius' seventy-two disciples were capped, and forty-two were uncapped. The reason given is that surely the *Analects* speaks first of *guan zhe wu liu ren* (Adults five six men), and five times six makes thirty; and then of *tong zi liu qi ren* (boys six seven person), and six times seven makes forty-two. (Cf. Wang Liqi,

Lidai xiaohua ji (Shanghai Guji, 1981), p. 11. Wang Liqi fails to identify the Dunhuang Manuscript number, which was kindly pointed out to me by Dorothée Kehren.)

12. Cf. C. Harbsmeier, "*Confucius Ridens*: Humour in the *Analects*."
13. *Meng Zi* 3B8.
14. Ibid. 2A2; cf. also Wang Chong, *Lun Heng*, ed. Zhonghua Shuju, p. 1035.
15. *Meng Zi* 4B33.
16. *Shuo Yuan* 5.20, ed. Zhao Shanyi, p. 120.
17. Ibid. 18.31, p. 558; and *Kong Zi Jia Yu*, chap. 2, no. 17, ed. Wanyouwenku, p. 51; cf. R. P. Kramers, *K'ung Tzu Chia Yü: The School Sayings of Confucius* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950), p. 238.
18. Cf., e.g., the entertaining tale about the wise butcher in *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* 9.28, ed. Xu Weiyu, p. 332; cf. J. R. Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Applications of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 315.
19. *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* 7.11; cf. J. R. Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan*, p. 235; cf. also *Xin Xu*, 8.12. The *Zuo Zhuan*, Duke Min year 2 (660 B.C.), ed. Yang Bojun (Peking: Zhonghua, 1983), p. 265, provides the earliest version of this story, which also recurs in *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 11.3, ed. Chen Qiyou (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1984), p. 588. The burlesque and humorous elements in the *Zuo Zhuan* deserve a close study in their own right which they cannot receive here.
20. *Yan Zi Chun Qiu* 1.25, Wu Zeyu, p. 90. Cf. the shorter and simplified version in *Shuo Yuan* 9.16, ed. Zhao Shanyi, p. 252. Cf. also *Yan Tzu Chun Qiu* 7.13. I translate the more elaborate version in *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* 9.10; cf. R. Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan*, p. 298f.
21. *Yen Tzu Chun Chiu* chap. 6, ed. Wu Tse-yü, p. 389.
22. Ibid.
23. *Zhan Guo Ce* no. 359, ed. Zhu Zugeng, p. 1255; cf. J. I. Crump, *Chan-Kuo Ts'e* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 431.
24. Cf. *Shih Ching*, no. 205.
25. *Zhan Guo Ce* no. 42, ed. Zhu Zugeng, p. 29; cf. J. I. Crump, *Chan-Kuo Ts'e*, p. 51.
26. The *Zhan Guo Ce* occasionally indulges in a certain amount of erotic comic license: for an example, see *Zhan Guo Ce*, ed. Zhu Zugeng, p. 203.
27. *Zhan Guo Ce*, Song-Wei no. 15, ed. Zhu Zugeng, p. 1707.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., *Chu Ce* 1, p. 711.
30. Ibid.
31. *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 18.5, ed. Chen Qiyou, p. 1186.
32. Ibid., p. 1187.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid. 11.4, p. 596. The text adds a comment to the tale: "Fearlessness of this sort is worse than cowardice."
35. Ibid. 15.8, p. 936. The text continues: "The boat has already moved, but the sword has not. Is it not confused to look for a sword in this way?" Cf. also ibid. 22.3, p. 1497.
36. Ibid. 24.3, p. 1601. The text continues: "It was fair enough that he disliked others hearing him. But it was silly to dislike hearing it himself."
37. *Han Fei Zi*, ed. Zhou Zhongling et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 31.13.
38. Ibid. 31.13.
39. Ibid. 31.14.
40. Ibid. 32.30.
41. Ibid. 32.16.
42. Ibid. 32.38.
43. Ibid. 32.34.
44. Ibid. 32.37.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid. 32.35.
47. Ibid. 49.1.33.
48. Ibid.

49. Ibid. 32.12.

50. Ibid. 21.16. Wang Chong, *Lun Heng* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), p. 1035, has an abbreviated and more elegant version of this story. And *Lie Zi* chap. 8, ed. Yang Bojun (Hong Kong: Taiping Shuju, 1965), p. 155, draws the following pedestrian Taoist conclusion: "Therefore the Sage trusts the transforming process of the Way and puts no trust in cunning and skill."

51. Ibid.

52. *Han Fei Zi* 32.13.

53. *Zhuang Zi*, Harvard Yenching Index Series, 17.79.

54. *Zhuang Zi* 19.35.

55. *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 18.6, ed. Chen Qiyou, p. 1178.

56. For an interesting comparable story on Hui Shi, see *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 18.6, ed. Chen Qiyou, p. 1197.

57. *Shuo Yuan* 11.8, ed. Zhao Shanyi (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chuban She, 1985), p. 307.

58. *Zhuang Zi* 17.85; see A. C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 123.

59. Most direct evidence about early Chinese 'sophistry' comes from sources hostile to this 'sophistry'. It just so happened that during the third and fourth centuries, when a certain intellectual flippancy was the fashion, someone still found access to some genuine material from the third century.

60. We do also have the *Dialogue on Meanings and Things*, but this seems to me to be a document for which there are many widely different interpretations, none of which carries conviction; like Janusz Chmielewski, I simply cannot pretend that I can make sense of the text.

61. The suggestion that a philosophically important text may ultimately involve a flippant use of logic is by no means unheard of. Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* has been interpreted as a logical game rather than a serious dialogue.

62. *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 18.5, ed. Chen Qiyou, p. 1186.

63. Sima Qian, *Shi Ji*, trans. William Dolby and John Scott (Edinburgh: Southside Publishers, 1974), chap. 126, pp. 159–168.

64. Liu Xie, *Wen Xin Diao Long*, ed. and trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1983), chap. 15, pp. 154–165.