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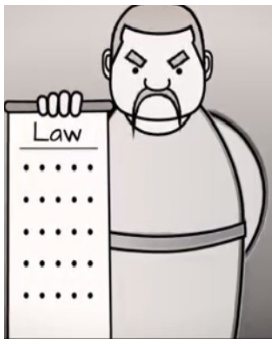
3.5 Logic and the law metaphor

As we saw in lecture 3.4, both the Western term "argument" and Mozi's concept of 辯 **biàn** are about:

(1) dispute *and*
(2) methods to settle the dispute (a *proof* in the West, a *distinction* for Mozi.)

Recall, however, that translating 辯 **biàn** as "argument" invites confusion, because logic and argument structure are **Western discoveries.** Mozi's concept of disagreement fits the rectify names model—disagree about a distinction. The Western conception of argument structure fits the **universal command** part of the metaphor of **law.** Mozi's fits the sign post model of the Chinese metaphor of 道 **dào** (path).



Patterns of argument often rely on one or more of the premises being in **law-like form** (i.e., making a **universal** claim).

Aristotle used:

Premise 1: All men are mortal.
Premise 2: Socrates is a man.
Therefore,
Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

(Note that Premise 1 makes a **universal** claim: *All* men are mortal.)

It is very hard to prove anything logically without having **at least one law**, that is, one **universal** premise. It's easier with either an "all" sentence (e.g., "All cherries are red") or a "no" sentence (e.g., "No man can fly"). To see why it is difficult to deduce anything from premises that are *not* laws, consider the following:

Premise 1: Some of the students in this class are sitting in the right hand section.
Premise 2: Some of the students in this class are male.
Premise 3: Some of the students in this class are from Hong Kong.

Now, from these premises, can we deduce that therefore there is a male student sitting on the right?
No.
Can we deduce that there is a Hong Kong student sitting on the right?
No.
Can we deduce that some of the male students are from Hong Kong?
No.

So this metaphor of **law** that we understood initially as a kind of political structure where there's an **authority** who commands you to behave a certain way (and punishes you if you don't), now has a **logical** role to play. Knowing some laws starts to seem necessary in order to reason about anything. *(That's not quite true, but it's close enough to true to become a stereotype in Western thinking.)*

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So now we can see why **ethics** in the West often takes the form of a search for **the highest level moral law**. The search is for some universal claim that can serve as the basis for all ethical discussion, a first principle of morality from which everything follows logically.
The idea is that ethical reasoning should take something like the following form:

Premise 1: *Some universal moral law.*
Premise 2: *Facts about the situation under scrutiny.*
Conclusion: Obliged to (prohibited from)*...in this situation.*

Reasoning and argument *is* found in the Chinese philosophers. Recall the **rectifying names passage** in the Analects. But the classical philosophers did not talk of Confucius's passage in terms of **logic** and **argument structure**. Their counterpart of a universal law is a constant 道 **dào**. But a constant 道 **dào** is a **natural process**, rather than a **linguistic structure** (a sentence in a language).
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