

Comments on E. Bruce Brooks's Dating of MC 2, 3 and a Little Bit of 4

2A7

According to Bruce, 2A7 can be paired with 2A8 as passages that are about correcting errors. It belongs to the series 2A3-2B1, which is a restatement of the Mencian statecraft theory by the southern group of Mencians.

But is 2A7 really about statecraft? For me—often jobless or employed in low-paying jobs where I'm exploited and possibly exploiting others, concerned about what line of work it is best for me to pursue, and sometimes in the position of having to advise younger acquaintances about their future careers—almost nothing in *Mencius* hits home harder than this passage. It sounds more like advice given to 士 on what considerations ought to bear upon the choice of one's career, than to a ruler on how best to govern the state or rule over the people.

Perhaps, also, 2A7 is addressed to the southern Mencians themselves, or to their disciples, instead of a ruler who they hope will employ them and adopt their proposed policies—especially given the last sentence about seeking the cause of failure in oneself.

In terms of content, 2A7 can be paired both with 2A8 and 2A6. 2A7 and 2A8, as Bruce observes, both mention correcting one's own mistakes. As for 2A6 and 2A7, the former passage states that one without the four beginnings of 仁義禮智 is not human, and the latter passage states that one without 仁智禮義 is a slave.

A useful comparison can be made, too, between 2A7 and two passages in MC6A, namely 6A16-17. 2A7 claims that 仁 is 天之尊爵. Likewise, 6A16 claims that 仁 along with other virtues are 天爵, and contrasts these with the honors bestowed by men.

6A16-17 show the influence, I think, of doctrines traditionally attributed to Song Xing, who according to *Zhuangzi* 33 emphasized the conduct which is the heart's [心之行]. Below I list some of these doctrines that seem to have been incorporated into several passages in *Mencius*:

1. To be insulted is not to be disgraced (the consequence of “freeing ...self-respect from the judgment of others”, in A. C. Graham's words);
2. Removing narrow mental conceptions (thus becoming broadminded);
3. The essential desires are few (so we should reduce desires).

I propose that 6A16-17, and also 2A7, bear the imprint of the first doctrine listed above—more precisely the implicit idea that human dignity does not depend on social status. But this idea is

of course given a Mencian twist: as 2A7 puts it, someone who is not 仁智禮義 is a slave¹ who ought to be ashamed of the fact.

On the topic of shame, 2A7 bears a very close parallel to 2A4:

(2A4) 仁則榮, 不仁則辱. 今惡辱而居不仁, 是猶惡溼而居下也. 如惡之, 莫如貴德而尊士....

Lau translation: “Benevolence brings honor; cruelty, disgrace. Now people who dwell in cruelty while disliking disgrace are like those who are content to dwell in a low-lying place while disliking dampness. If one dislikes disgrace, one’s best course of action is to honor virtue and to respect Gentlemen.”

(2A7) 夫仁, 天之尊爵也, 人之安宅也. 莫之禦而不仁, 是不智也. 不仁, 不智, 無禮, 無義, 人役也. 人役而恥為役, 由弓人而恥為弓, 矢人而恥為矢也. 如恥之, 莫如為仁.

Lau translation: “Benevolence is the high honor bestowed by Heaven and the peaceful abode of man. Not to be benevolent when nothing stands in the way is to show a lack of wisdom. A man neither benevolent nor wise, devoid of courtesy and dutifulness, is a slave. A slave ashamed of serving is like a maker of bows ashamed of making bows, or a maker of arrows ashamed of making arrows. If one is ashamed, there is no better remedy than to practice benevolence.”

The quoted passages share the same theme, but while 2A4 is addressed to the ruler, 2A7 is addressed to the 士.

Possible connections to MC4 (which Bruce assigns to northern Mencians) in 2A7:

- 4A7 (恥): 2A7 advises 如恥之, 莫如為仁. 4A7 similarly advises 如恥之, 莫若師文王. The sentences preceding the advice in each of these two passages are also similar, and perhaps these parallels, similarly positioned near the beginning of the writings of the two Mencian branches after the split, are not at all coincidental.
- 4A10 (安宅): 2A7’s claim that benevolence is 人之安宅 can also be found in 4A10, paired with a corresponding claim about rightness—仁, 人之安宅也; 義, 人之正路也 (which is echoed in 6A11 in slightly different terms: 仁, 人心也; 義, 人路也).

¹ 人役: I like Legge’s translation of this as “servant of *other men*”, which fits in well with the 6A17 observation that those whom other men (like Zhao Meng) can ennoble, other men (like Zhao Meng) can also humble.

2A9

Let us distinguish between sage kings (more precisely, sagely 王 or 君) and sage ministers (to be more precise, sagely 士 or 臣). Sage kings are compared, for instance, in 7B33. 2A9 compares sage ministers, and I will restrict my discussion below to passages comparing sage ministers in the *Mencius*.

Two contrasting norms or ideals are set forth, embodied in the persons of Bo Yi and Liu Xia Hui. Liu Xia Hui here seems to be the Confucian sagely surrogate for Song Xing or his ideas (i.e., the dissociation of self-respect from social regard/status, and the removal of narrow conceptions).

Perhaps significantly, Liu Xia Hui is missing from a similar contrast of sagely ideals in 2A2. 2A2 has Bo Yi and Yi Yin instead. Both passages are alike in pointing out that these contrasting ideals are extreme or one-sided, and in preferring a more comprehensive ideal (e.g., Confucius, explicitly mentioned in 2A2).

In MC 1~3, Liu Xia Hui appears only in one passage (2A9); in MC 4~7, Liu Xia Hui appears in four passages (5B1, 6B6, 7A28, 7B15).

MC 4~7 contain three similar passages comparing sagely ideals, in 5B1, 6B6, 7B15, and these comparisons all mention Bo Yi and Liu Xia Hui, as in 2A7; 5B1 and 6B6 also include Yi Yin.

I conclude by summarizing all the passages in the *Mencius* comparing the virtues of sagely ministers:

- 2A2 Bo Yi, Yi Yin, Confucius (3-way comparison; best is Confucius)
- 2A9 Bo Yi, Liu Xia Hui (2-way comparison; both assessed negatively)
- 5B1 Bo Yi, Yi Yin, Liu Xia Hui, Confucius (4-way comparison; best is Confucius)
- 6B6 Bo Yi, Yi Yin, Liu Xia Hui (3-way comparison; all assessed positively)
- 7B15 Bo Yi, Liu Xia Hui (2-way comparison; both assessed positively)

2B2

Bruce believes that 2A1 is a later interpolation. He dates 2B2 to c0298, and 2A1 to c0295. But the end of 2B2 seems to allude to the beginning paragraph of 2A1, more specifically:

(2A1) ...管仲, 曾西之所不為也, 而子為我願之乎

(2B2) ...管仲且猶不可召, 而況不為管仲者乎

Doesn't the 2B2 line seem to assume that the reader is already acquainted with what Mencius says in 2A1?

There is no clear answer to this question, I think. So, let me ask a more general question: are there any other, and clearer, cases where later passages seem to refer back or allude to earlier passages in the *Mencius*?

Take the example of the baby about to fall into a well, mentioned in passing in 3A5. Lau says in a footnote that this brief mention “seems to be a reference to the example given in 2A6”. Or, perhaps, it was a stock example that was common knowledge among Mohists and Mencians.

3A1

Bruce suggests that the mention of goodness of human nature in this passage is the first mention of this doctrine in the southern Mencian corpus, and that there is no trace of the idea in MC 1~2 (in Bruce's words, “utterly unknown to MC 1-2”). I wonder if this is true.

The doctrine of the goodness of human nature is a package deal, including a number of component claims. The claim that human nature is good is the flashiest part of the package, but hardly plays a functional role. As explained in 6A6, by human nature's being good, what's meant is that as far as our 情 is concerned, we are capable of becoming good. This is followed by the enumeration of the four feelings that pertain to the four virtues. We find this enumeration also in 2A6. Then follows the idea of seeking [求] and finding [得] (these four feelings of) the heart, which in MC1-2 can arguably be found in 1A7² and 2A2.³ Lastly, in 6A6 and 6A7, there is the idea that although some humans are far better than others, things of the same kind are alike and therefore the sage and other men are the same in kind. The same idea is found in the concluding sentences of 2A2, but with a different emphasis (i.e., although things of the same kind are alike and therefore the sage and other men are the same in kind, Confucius towers over everyone else).

More specifically, the debate between Gaozi and Mencius (6A1-6A5) centers on Gaozi's claim that benevolence is internal but rightness is external. Mencius opposed this claim. This bone of contention is also mentioned in 2A2.⁴

Let me suggest also that the idea that 性 is what distinguishes us from animals is implicit in both 6A3 and 2A6. In 6A3, Mencius seems to be opposed to the claim that 生 is what is meant by 性,

² 反而求之，不得吾心。夫子言之，於我心有戚戚焉。

³ 不得於言，勿求於心，不可。

⁴ 告子未嘗知義，以其外之也。

at least when understood as having the implication that we have this nature in common with animals. 2A6 claims that those without the four beginnings of morality are not human.

So, I have proposed that nearly all the key components of the Mencian doctrine that human nature is good can be found in MC1-2, namely in the three passages 1A7 (c0298), 2A2 (c0303), and 2A6 (c0300). According to Bruce, all these passages are dated earlier than 3A1 (c0278). Some revision or clarification seems necessary here.

3B9

Bruce dates this passage to the time when Xunzi arrived in Lu as governor, i.e., shortly after 0254. He suggests that it shows accommodation to Xunzi's philosophy by representing Mencius's ideas as attacks on Xunzi's enemies, namely Mohists and Daoists.

Bruce claims that MC3 and MC7 share some features that are not found elsewhere in *Mencius* (thus supporting the view that these two books share the same timeframe), and that hostility to the doctrines of Yang and Mo is one such feature. This claim is interesting and plausible. I will try to challenge it, in order to help strengthen it.

3B9 says that the doctrines of Yang (egoism) and Mo (impartial concern) amount, respectively, to a denial of one's ruler and of one's father. Thus it blocks the Confucian way of benevolence and rightness. This echoes the argument in 1A1, where the profit-seeking motive (as in the king's concern for profiting the state) will lead the 大夫 to seek the profit of their own families, and the 士庶人 to seek the profit of their own persons. But benevolent persons would not abandon their parents, and righteous persons would not neglect their prince. Since Yang and Mo were alike in emphasizing 利, whether for oneself or for everyone, it seems possible to read 1A1 as an indirect criticism of Yang and Mo.

Song Xing is another figure who seems to have used 利-based considerations to argue for his doctrines, and 6B4's criticism of Song Xing is similar to the arguments made in 1A1 and 3B9.

So, may I suggest: 3B9's mention of Yang and Mo together is shared uniquely with 7A26 and 7B26, but the main line of criticism deployed in 3B9 can be found in 1A1 and 6B4 (though not in 7A26 and 7B26).

There is a second criticism of Yang and Mo in 3B9, which builds on the first criticism, but echoes a different earlier passage than 1A1. This is the criticism that Yang and Mo's doctrines are biased, excessive and heretical, indicative of mental flaws that give rise to flawed policies and practices. For comparison:

(2A2) 諛辭知其所蔽, 淫辭知其所陷, 邪辭知其所離, 遁辭知其所窮. 生於其心, 害於其政; 發於其政, 害於其事. 聖人復起, 必從吾言矣.

(3B9) 放淫辭, 邪說者不得作. 作於其心, 害於其事; 作於其事, 害於其政. 聖人復起, 不易吾言矣.... 我亦欲正人心, 息邪說, 距詖行, 放淫辭....

This is more in line with the criticism of Yang and Mo in 7A26, namely that they are each holding on to one corner of the Way at the expense of others—the ideas behind these criticisms are quite similar, but the actual language used in 3B9 and 7A26 is different. Here is the criticism in 7A26:

(3B9) 執中無權, 猶執一也. 所惡執一者, 為其賊道也, 舉一而廢百也.

4A and 2A

Bruce believes that there are thematic correlations between the first writings of the southern Mencians and those of the northern Mencians after their split—e.g., 2A3-4 and 4A2-3 on benevolence and cruelty. And he asks whether there are any philosophical contrasts between these two pairs.

My rough impression, not based on a close study, is that there is greater emphasis on interiority in 2A3-4, as a potential source of personal autonomy even for the 民 (or of independence from external circumstance and control, for anyone with a mind of their own, who therefore need to be coaxed not forced into submission). In 4A2, there is greater emphasis on external models. To speculate wildly, 2A3-4 shows the influence of doctrines associated with Song Xing, and 4A2 shows the influence of doctrines attributable to Gaozi. Ideas associated with Song Xing seem to crop up again from MC6 onward, but so do the ideas I tentatively attribute to Gaozi. Anyway, my impression about the philosophical contrast between 4A and 2A is most likely an artifact of poor sampling: 4A9 with its emphasis on winning the heart of the people, by amassing what they like and not imposing what they dislike, seems to have some parallels in 2A3-4. And as already noted, 4A7 contains a sentence on feeling ashamed that has very close parallels in 2A4 and especially 2A7.