

## Questions and Answers

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Texts state doctrines. But if a doctrine should change, that text becomes a problem. The problem can be solved by having that text (or a later one) correct the earlier idea. I have previously given examples of this literary technique.<sup>1</sup> Here are a few more.

**Virtue.** The Analects (Lún Yǔ 論語, 05c-03c) began as a collection of sayings of Confucius.<sup>2</sup> To this core, there were later added hundreds of “sayings” of Confucius which respond to new situations or address what had come to seem to be errors. The original sayings were simply remarks, introduced by the formula “The Master said” (子曰). Later ones begin with a disciple question or a situation, and end with the Master informing, or correcting, the disciple. The Confucians repeatedly tried to define the cardinal virtue *rén* 仁, by offering examples. This example fails:

Dž-jāng asked, Director Intendant Dž-wǎn thrice took office as Director Intendant without showing pleasure, and thrice left it without showing resentment; of the former Director Intendant’s acts he would always inform the new Director Intendant. What would you say about that? The Master said, He was loyal. He said, Was he *rén*? He said, I don’t know; where would that qualify as *rén*? (LY 5:18, c0470).

Early Confucianism is here reaching toward, or defending against misunderstanding, a higher concept of itself, and of its mission, than mere bureaucratic accountability.

**Meditation.** Among the early disciples (05c), Yén Ywān (or Yén Hwéi), who obviously knew Indian breath control, was esteemed for his quickness of mind. In this late 04c story, he has become the slowest of the slow, the most object of the object:

Yén Ywān asked about *rén*. The Master said, To overcome the self and turn to propriety 復禮 is *rén*. If one day he can overcome himself and turn to *rén*, the world will turn to *rén* along with him. To be *rén* comes from the self; does it then come from others? Yén Ywān said, I beg to ask for the details. The Master said, If it is improper 非禮, do not look at it. If it is improper, do not listen to it. If it is improper, do not speak of it. If it is improper, do not do it. Yén Ywān said, Though Hwéi is not quick, he begs to devote himself to this saying (LY 13:1, c0326).

What had been a *meditative* definition of *rén* is here replaced by a *ritualist* definition of *rén*. A focus on ritual propriety (lǐ 禮) was the hallmark of the Second Confucian school, beginning under Dž-sz in c 0400. A quarter century later (LY 15:31, c0301), the school would explicitly reject meditation as a valid mode of knowledge.

<sup>1</sup>Brooks **Reader**.

<sup>2</sup>Brooks **Analects** 13-19.

**Mencius 5** (萬章, early 03c), a stone of stumbling for readers who believe that they understand the rest of the Mencius, is a series of questions, mostly by one Wàn Jāng, which are answered by “Mencius.” The answers describe the political world as it is, the world with which the statecraft aspirations of the sect must deal. Why Wàn Jāng? Perhaps because, in all probability, he was the first leader of the Northern Mencians, and supervised the compilation of the first Northern chapter (the preceding MC 4), which takes a distinctively intuitionist view of both statecraft and personal cultivation. In MC 5, a more public-minded successor tells Wàn Jāng how the world really works:

Wàn Jāng asked, The Shī [101] says, “To take a wife, how is it done? One must inform one’s father and mother.” If we are to believe these words, then it would be inappropriate to do as Shùn did. That Shùn married without telling his parents; why was that?

Mencius said, If he had told them, he would not have been able to marry. That man and woman should dwell together, is the greatest of human relations.<sup>3</sup> If he had told them, he would have sacrificed this greatest of human relations, and would have been resentful toward his parents . . . (MC 5A2, c0270)

This question had been solved by Wàn Jāng himself in an earlier passage (MC 4A26), but in the generation after him, it was reopened for further, and revisionist, analysis.

**Sywndž 5.** Sywndž (c0310-c0235) at first regarded the ancient Kings (all mythical) as the model of good government. Shortly after an unsuccessful interview in Chín (0264), a country in which the old was explicitly rejected in favor of the new, Sywndž shifted his previous position, and insisted on the Later (that is, the Historical) Kings. At one point in his writings (SZ 5:4), he overrules his previous self in this way:

Literary records vanish after a long time . . . Those responsible for preserving the model were often lax in their duty. Hence I say: If you would see the traces of the sage kings, let it be where they are clearest – in the Later Kings.

As far as this paragraph is concerned, Sywndž himself has always held that opinion. Only if we read all his works do we see that this paragraph amounts to a correction.

**The Questions of King Milinda** (Milinda Pañha, 01c-2c) is a series of questions addressed by Menander, the 02c Indo-Greek King of Bactria, to the Buddhist sage Nāgasena (an invented character). The format allows the sage to explain certain points, in fact certain *new* points, of Buddhist doctrine. This one resolves a contradiction:

[Q] Venerable Nāgasena, it has been said by the Blessed One: “With opportunity, and secrecy, And the right woo’r, all women will go wrong – Aye, failing others, with a cripple even.” But on the other hand, it is said:<sup>4</sup> “Mahosadha’s wife, Amarâ, when left behind in the village while her husband was away on a journey, remained alone and in privacy, and regarding her husband as a man would regard his sovran lord, she refused to do wrong, even when tempted with a thousand pieces.” Now if the first of these passages be correct, the second must be wrong, and if the second be right, the first must be wrong. This is a double-edged problem put to you, and you have to solve it.

The contradiction is not denied; it is sharply presented. What will the answer be?

<sup>3</sup>Compare Jesus’ defense of marriage as the primary human relation, Mk 19:6-9.

<sup>4</sup>Not by the Buddha, but in a Jātaka story (#536), reflecting a sort of Buddhist folklore.

The answer is to first concede the older tradition, and then to dismantle it:

[A] It is so said, O King, as you have quoted, touching the conduct of Amarâ, Mahosadha's wife. But the question is, Would she have done wrong, on receipt of those thousand pieces, with the right man, or would she not have done so, if she had had the opportunity, and the certainty of secrecy, and a suitable wooer? Now, on considering the matter, that lady Amarâ was not certain of any of these things. Through her fear of censure in this world the opportunity seemed to her not fit, and through her fear of the sufferings of purgatory in the next world. And because she knew how bitter is the fruit of wrong-doing, and because she did not wish to lose her loved one, and because of the high esteem in which she held her husband, and because she honored goodness, and despised ignobleness of life, and because she did not want to break with her customary mode of life – for all these reasons the opportunity seemed to her not fit. And further, she refused to do wrong because, on consideration, she was not sure of keeping the thing secret from the world. For even could she have kept it secret from men, yet she could not have concealed it from spirits – even could she have concealed it from spirits . . .

And, perhaps a trifle ungallantly toward Amarâ, and to the concept of female virtue, which has been shown not to exist, the seeming contradiction vanishes.

**The Bhagavad Gitâ** is a long section in Book 6 of the Mahâbhârata. Battle impends with the Pânḍavas and their enemies. Arjuna, the leading Pânḍavas warrior, seeing many of his friends and kin on the other side, doubts if he should fight. Lord Krishna says it is duty as a warrior. His acceptance, as Waley notes, is the climax of the entire work. Here is how Waley himself renders its peak moment:

You, god imperishable,  
Have broken my illusion;  
By your grace I have remembered.  
I take my stand, I doubt no longer,  
I will do your bidding.

The paradox of conflicting values is resolved. Caste has triumphed over conscience.

**Ezra 10:10-11** thus address the men of Judah and Benjamin:

And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have trespassed, and have married foreign women, to increase the built of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto Jehovah the God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women.

And shortly “they made an end with all the men that had married foreign women.”

**Ruth's** widowed mother is returning from Moab to her native Bethlehem, and she advises her daughters, also Moabite widows, to remain in Moab. Ruth's reply

Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God [Ruth 1:16-17].

has endeared her to many. But the point of the story is not its sentiment, but its final chapter, which reveals Ruth as an ancestress of that unassailable figure, King David.

The Scriptures are never more interesting than when the later argue with the earlier, for a more inclusive view of both God and man.

**Peter.** Since Theodore Weeden's 1971 study, it has been widely accepted that the Gospel of Mark was written "against the disciples," especially Peter. What has gone unnoticed<sup>5</sup> is that there are also places in Mark where Peter is praised, where he is indeed portrayed as the leader among the disciples. Still less is it noticed that when Peter is praised, it is because he understands Jesus as the coming Davidic Messiah, but when he is corrected, it is where he fails to accept a much later concept of Jesus, as one who will presently redeem the world by his death.<sup>6</sup> The difference is important.

Here is one place where Peter's answer to a question is tacitly approved:

And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am? And they told him, saying, John the Baptist, and others, Elijah, but others, One of the prophets. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter *answereth* and *saith* unto him, Thou art the Anointed.<sup>7</sup> And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. [Mk 8:27-30].<sup>8</sup>

Peter and the rest know the truth, but for good reasons (the Messianic project was seditious, and Roman spies were everywhere), they are enjoined to keep it secret.

The most extreme rejection of Peter comes immediately thereafter:

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he turned about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. [Mk 8:31-33]

where Jesus no longer presents himself as the coming political Messiah, but instead as one who will rise again after three days in the tomb. To this new idea, Peter objects. The later passage, juxtaposed as it is to the earlier, is meant to *correct* the earlier.

If he is seen as accepting an *original* conception of Jesus, and then as rejecting a *later* conception of Jesus, Peter becomes consistent throughout. He represents the same view in all situations. It is the text of Mark that causes problems: by evolving, and by reflecting developments in Christian thinking about Jesus during the extended period over which it seems to have taken shape. Peter is the holdout.

**The Last Supper.** Another contrast, our last example, is not within Mark, but (as in the case of Ezra and Ruth) between it and the later Gospels, especially the last of them: John. It involves not just a change in doctrine, but a change in practice. That the change was gradual is seen if we include the intervening Gospel of Luke.

<sup>5</sup>Except by the author, who at p23 notes Mark's "ambivalent" treatment of the disciples, both positive (3:13-19, 6:7 "the special agents for the extension of his ministry;" 4:10ff, 3:34, 9:30-31, 13:1ff "receivers of special revelation;" and 14:32ff "his confidants") and negative (4:13, 6:51-52, 8:14-21, 9:32 "their obstinacy;" and 14:10, 50, 66-71 "rejection of Jesus"). One purpose of the present note is to keep the positive instances also in view.

<sup>6</sup>See Brooks **Resurrection, Davidic**, and for some later concepts, **Time, Twelve**.

<sup>7</sup>One designated as either king or high priest; supreme political or religious authority.

<sup>8</sup>Not listed among the positive treatments of the disciples at Weeden **Mark 23**.

The account of Jesus' Last Supper runs thus in Mark (completed c45):

And as they were eating, he took bread, and when he had blessed, he broke it, and gave to them, and said, "Take ye, this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them, and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, "Verily, I say unto you, I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God." [Mk 14:22-25]

The Supper is presented as symbolic. In Luke (c66), the description of the Supper is similar, but it has now come to be institutionalized as a repeated observance:

This do in remembrance of me. [Lk 22:19b].

In John (c90), the remembrance has gained power of its own, and become a sacrament: a symbolic eating of the god Jesus. This new idea did arouse opposition. Jesus speaks:

"I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. Yea, and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?? Jesus therefore said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." [Jn 6:51-53]

And, like so many developments, we see that this one met with resistance.

### Conclusion

These examples, and many more, remind us that memory is a problem for ideology. If ideas changed but all believers changed with them, there would not be a problem. The problem is the text, precisely because the text does persist, and continues to bear witness to an earlier understanding. Short of abandoning the text, a thing rarely done in the history of thought, the text must be brought up to date, and the change in understanding must be, if not obliterated, at least explained. Representing the early view as an error, and the later view as correct, whether in the same text or a later one, is one way that this task of doctrinal adjustment can be accomplished.

The whole technique can be summed up in a line not infrequently heard by academic persons from their Dean: "That was then, this is now."

### *Works Cited*

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