

## The Fisherman Fallacy

E Bruce Brooks 白牧之

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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**Abstract.** Modern readers tend to like, in antiquity, what is nearest their own time: what is *least antique*. In a composite text, posterity will thus often prefer the later parts, the ones where the text has reconfigured itself so as to appeal to later readers.<sup>1</sup> This danger, this snare of affection for the modern reader, I call the Fisherman Fallacy.

### Jwāngdǔ 31 漁父

This chapter, “The Fisherman,” consists of a single and beautiful story, in which “Confucius” treats with reverence a sage hermit who seems to reject everything that Confucius has always stood for. In contrast to the terse style of the earlier Jwāngdǔ, this piece builds slowly, gathering atmosphere as it goes by echoing the Analects, especially those Analects passages which are closest to Dàuist thought:

Confucius had been wandering in the Black Curtain forest, and sat down to rest atop Apricot Altar.<sup>2</sup> His disciples were reading their books; Confucius was singing to the string and thrumming his cithern. The song was not yet half done when a fisherman got out of his boat and approached. His beard and eyebrows were white; his hair hung loose and his sleeves waved. He climbed up the shore and stopped when he reached level ground. His left hand rested on his knee, his right hand cradled his chin; thus he listened. When the song was finished, he beckoned to Dǔ-gùng and Dǔ-lù.<sup>3</sup> The two came over. The stranger indicated Confucius, and said, Who is that?<sup>4</sup> Dǔ-lù replied, He is a gentleman of Lù. The stranger asked his ancestry. Dǔ-lù replied, He is of the Kǔng clan. The stranger said, What do the Kǔngs do?<sup>5</sup> Dǔ-lù made no answer, but Dǔ-gùng replied, As for the Kǔngs: within, they embody loyalty and fidelity;<sup>6</sup> without, they practice benevolence and righteousness;<sup>7</sup> they adorn with rites and music, and select from human relationships; above, they relate loyally to the rulers of the age; below, they bring transformation to the lower populace. They offer benefit to the whole world. *This* is what the Kǔngs do.

<sup>1</sup>For this common and important phenomenon, see Brooks **Reader**.

<sup>2</sup>The site of the long and beautiful (and, for the Analects, atypical) LY 11:24.

<sup>3</sup>The same two disciples who failed to answer the questions of two hermits in LY 18:5.

<sup>4</sup>彼何爲者 inquires not about identity so much as about social role; hence the reply.

<sup>5</sup>何治也 “What do they have charge of?” Notice the extremely slow tempo of this piece. Notice also that the piece is not against Confucius, but against the whole “Kǔng” enterprise.

<sup>6</sup>The essence of the early Confucian aristocratic warrior code; see LY 9:25, 1:8.

<sup>7</sup>The signature phrase of the later ethicized Confucianism of Mencius; see MC 1A1.

Surely there could be no more high-minded answer, no more complete defense. The visitor then proceeds to disassemble that defense in two quick strokes:

He asked, Are they rulers with territory? Dž-gùng answered, No. He asked, Are they assistants to some Lord or King? Dž-gùng answered, No. The stranger smiled and turned to go, saying, Benevolent; yes, benevolent; but I fear he will not escape with a whole skin. He toils his frame and endangers his true self. Alas! So far removed is he from the Way.

Dž-gùng returned and reported to Confucius. Confucius put aside his cithern and rose, saying, Is this not a sage? And seeking after him, he came to the water's edge, where the fisherman was just about to take up his pole and steer his boat . . .

And the story goes on, drawing on several Jwāngdž stories in which Confucius admits the superior wisdom of his Dàuist opposite.<sup>8</sup> The fisherman shows that, without an official position, mere ritual and relational excellence has no meaning. Confucius confesses bafflement at his failures,<sup>9</sup> and is shown that activity is not the way to cure the failures of activity. The fisherman's secret is sincerity (誠), the key term of the 03c Jūng Yūng – the inner element which attends all right efforts, gaining results which Confucians labor to produce from outside. This is no Dàuist refutation of Confucius; it is instead a refutation of activist 04c Confucianism by mystical 03c Confucianism, a view popular in the early Empire, And in later ages, including our own.

The story announces its own moral, in JZ 31:7, 同類相從，同聲相應 “Like kinds flock together, like sounds resonate.” This is also the moral of the present essay.

### Matthew 5-7

The Sermon on the Mount is undoubtedly the piece of Christian writing which is held in greatest esteem both inside<sup>10</sup> and outside<sup>11</sup> the Christian persuasion. It includes the Beatitudes, the Golden Rule, the Lord's Prayer. Its quick ascent to acceptance has been documented in the survey of Massaux. But its elements can easily be traced to earlier sources, mostly in Luke. The First Beatitude is often viewed as more primitive in its rugged Lukan form (“Blessed are the poor”) than in Matthew's attenuated version (“Blessed are the poor *in spirit*”). The Golden Rule is better placed in context, and thus presumptively earlier, in Luke.<sup>12</sup> The Lord's Prayer is thought by many to be formally earlier in its Lukan version.<sup>13</sup> All this suggests that the more popular Sermon *is also the more modern Sermon*.

<sup>8</sup>Such as JZ 14:5-7, where the Dàuist opposite is no less than Lǎu Dān himself.

<sup>9</sup>Compare JZ 20:6, from which the Fisherman author has borrowed several phrases.

<sup>10</sup>Note the glancing, but shattering, reference by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes at the end of his dissent in the matter of Rosika Schwimmer, 279 US 644, 653 (**Dissenting** 57).

<sup>11</sup>The final judgement of the Jewish commentator C G Montefiore, after registering doubts about the originality of the Sermon as a statement by Jesus, concludes, “It remains for all time a religious document of great nobility, significance, and power” (**Synoptic** 1/127).

<sup>12</sup>Montefiore **Synoptic** 1/119, “This maxim (the so-called Golden Rule) seems in a good connection in Luke.”

<sup>13</sup>Montefiore **Synoptic** 1/472; Kilpatrick **Origins** 21, notwithstanding Betz **Sermon** 372.

Attempts have been made to reverse that judgement. A conjectural text “Q” is posited as the source for Matthew’s Sermon, and “Q” is then dated to before Mark, so that Mark’s omission of the Sermon counts as negligence on Mark’s part, and not as evidence for the lateness of the Sermon. The Lukan Sermon on the Plain, evidently the base on which Matthew has agglomerated<sup>14</sup> his Sermon, is said to be later, even by commentators who compare the two side by side.<sup>15</sup> Such has been the rescue effort, which however fails against the decisive directional evidence for secondarity.

### Conclusion

We like, in antiquity, what in antiquity *is near to us*. When an ancient text makes sounds to which we resonate, the text may be making modern sounds. The rule for those who would read a text historically is: ignore your feelings. This is hard advice; sagehood is not easily won. But having won it, we are no longer seduced by the charm of the “love” treatise, 1 Corinthians 13,<sup>16</sup> or the affecting tale of the Woman Taken in Adultery, John 7:53-8:11.<sup>17</sup> We are not perplexed that, when Shǐ Jì 63 lists the parts of the Jwāngdǔ which it regards as being by the historical Jwāng Jōu, it ignores the craggy Inner Chapters (JZ 1-7) and names instead several higher-numbered chapters, *beginning with the Fisherman*. Not so surprisingly, it was the Hàn-period “Fisherman” that spoke most directly to the also Hàn-period authors of the Shǐ Jì.

*That is what it was put there for*, as Hàn enthusiasts added to their “Jwāngdǔ,” making it ever more their own.

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<sup>14</sup>Scraped together from hither and yon. The term is used in Streeter **Four** 167, 250, and 264 to describe the compositional process of Matthew in his Discourses, of which the Sermon is one. Comparison will show how Matthew has built up his Sermon by taking Luke’s Sermon, splitting it in half, and filling it in with matter drawn from elsewhere in Luke, the whole then augmented by Matthew’s own exceedingly stringent opinions about the Law.

<sup>15</sup>Betz **Sermon** 1-2 views the Lukan Sermon as “Greek rather than Jewish;” p572 describes the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount as written “in terms of Jewish morality” (and thus presumptively more primitive) and those of the Sermon on the Plain as relating to “Hellenistic literature elsewhere” (and thus presumptively later). This is a hermeneutic of desperation.

<sup>16</sup>See Walker **Interpolations** 147-165 for a thorough argument in favor of interpolation.

<sup>17</sup>See Metzger **Commentary** ad loc. The most decisive evidence against the Tale is the fact that has been inserted *at more than one place* in John, and in one manuscript, even in Luke.