

35. The Golden Rule

Luke 6:31

And here we come upon the Golden Rule, often praised as the essence of Christianity; indeed, of all religion. Whole books have been written about it. In the Gospel tradition, it first turns up as a line in Luke's Sermon on the Plain. We may now go back and take a longer look at that line.

Here is the line:

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.



Reflections

First we might ask: Is this verse at home in Luke? My answer would be No. It interrupts a series of verses on maintaining an *unequal* exchange:

6:30. Give to everyone that asketh thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.

[6:31. And as ye would that men should do you . . .]

6:32. And if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? For even sinners love those that love them.

6:33. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? For even sinners do the same.

Lk 6:31 is about reciprocity. It does not fit well where it is, or in Matthew's expanded form (Mt 7:12). It is probably a Luke B addition to the Sermon; something Luke had picked up in the meantime. Where did he get it? On its first appearance, in 05c China, it was rejected by the Confucians:

Analects 5:12 (c0470). Dž-gùng said, If I do not wish others to do something to me, I wish not do it to them. The Master said, Sž, this is not what you can come up to [it is too lofty a goal].

About a century later, it was *adopted* by the Confucians:

Analects 12:2 (c0326). Jùng-gūng asked about rín 仁.¹ The Master said, He leaves the gate as though he were meeting an important visitor; he employs the people as though he were assisting at a great sacrifice. What he himself does not want, let him not do it to others . . .

Analects *15:24 (c0301).² Dž-gùng asked, Is there one saying that one can put in practice in all circumstances? The Master said, that would be empathy (shù 恕), would it not? What he himself does not want, let him not do it to others.³

Analects *4:15 (c0294). The Master said, Shv̄m! My Way: by one thing I link it together. Dzv̄ngdž said, Yes. The Master went out, and the disciples asked, What did he mean? Dzv̄ngdž said, Our Respected Master's Way is simply loyalty (jùng 忠) and empathy (shù 恕).

Where did this interpersonal idea arise? It did not arise among the elite Confucians. It arose among the those lower down: the traders, the sub-elite Micians, whose primary philosophical tenet was undifferentiated love (兼愛). If you live by trade, you move among people of different religion and culture. The only basis for getting along is mutual trust and personal common interest. This maxim depends on no religious or cultural common ground whatever. *That is why it works.* Only the human is universal.

Nor was this Luke's only borrowing from what came over the trade routes.

¹The core Confucian virtue. It is of military origin; approximately "otherness."

²The asterisk indicates an interpolated Analects passage. See Brooks **Analects**.

³Here the maxim is not only accepted, but made a central principle.