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Parsing Reciprocity: Questions for the Golden Rule

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The Golden Rule is perhaps humanity’s most familiar ethical dictum. In conventional usage, the term refers to “the precept that one should do as one would be done by.”¹ The Oxford English Dictionary’s fifth definition of the word “golden” provides the following elaboration: “Of rules, precepts, etc.: Of inestimable utility; often spec. with reference to the precept, ‘whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them (Matt. VII. 12).² The rule also can be stated “negatively,” as in the Aramaic saying assigned in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 31a) to the first century BCE Jewish sage, Hillel: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your comrade. This is the entire Torah. And the rest is commentary. Go and study.” The Golden Rule appears in both religious and secular systems, and it has attracted the attention of sages and philosophers alike. Jeffrey Wattles³ admirably captures the Golden Rule’s virtues:

The golden rule is, from the first, intuitively accessible, easy to understand; its simplicity communicates confidence that the agent can find the right way. The rule tends to function as a simplified summary of the advocate’s moral tradition, and it most commonly expresses a

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³ Jeffrey Wattles, The Golden Rule (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 188. Wattles’ book serves as an intelligent, thoughtful, and extremely useful foundation for the work of this project. The questions proposed at the end build on Wattles’ work.
commitment to treating others with consideration and fairness, predicated on the recognition that others are like oneself.

The purpose of this project is to give the Golden Rule a fresh look in an unprecedented intellectual setting. For the first time, scholars of religion, philosophers, and scientists gather to share and compare their perspectives on the meaning and significance of the Golden Rule. Participants will examine the formulation and significance of the Golden Rule in the world’s major religions, and philosophers and scientists will assess anew how the Golden Rule works and what it implies, particularly as part of systems of morality and collective life. The goal of this brief introductory exercise is to supply the barest structure of a common agenda so that, at some level, we all can be part of a collective inquiry. Our hope is that a shared framework of description and analysis will facilitate and even generate a productive exchange among us.

On the basis of the definitions and formulations listed at the outset, we can take the term “the Golden Rule” to refer at least to a general statement that instructs us to treat others as we want, and would want, others to treat us. Thus, the Golden Rule is an abstract mandate to use an ethic of reciprocity as the fundamental guide to the way we consider, conceive, carry out, and assess our actions towards other people. The Golden Rule does not discuss particular actions, nor does it guarantee rewards for following it. Rather, it prescribes reciprocity as the foundational conceptual framework and context of consistency for shaping and evaluating our actions towards others.

Though the attachment of the adjective “golden” to the rule of reciprocity—suggesting its superiority over other rules—occurred in mid-sixteenth century Europe,4 statements recommending or at least approving reciprocity as a principle of behavior appear across humanity’s religions and cultures. J.O. Hertzler5 lists at least twenty-five variations of an RR, from the Yoruba to Kant, and contemporary websites provide comparable exhibits.6 The virtual ubiquity of the Golden Rule has led to judgments about its signal importance in ethics. Consider the following comment of Marcus G. Singer7:

The golden rule has been widely accepted, in word if not in deed, by vast numbers of greatly differing peoples; it is a basic device of moral  

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4 The Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia, (1978) IV, p. 608  
6 See, for example, the website of Prof. Harry Gensler, S.J., of John Carroll University, and the links listed there: http://www.jcu.edu/philosophy/gensler/goldrule.htm  
education; and it can be found at the core of innumerable moral, religious, and social codes....The nearly universal acceptance of the golden rule and its promulgation by persons of considerable intelligence, though otherwise of divergent outlooks, would...seem to provide some evidence for the claim that it is a fundamental ethical truth.

An alternative perspective is offered by ethicist Bernard Gert, who approves the Golden Rule’s sentiment but doubts its practical value. He suggests that a “straightforward reading” of the Golden Rule reveals its basic inability to help people decide what to do, so it cannot effectively inform conduct. Gert concludes that:

... the Golden Rule is not really a very good guide to conduct. It seems to require conduct that everybody admits is not required and sometimes seems to require conduct that is clearly wrong. If followed literally, and how else are we to understand it, it requires all normal policemen not to arrest criminals, and all normal judges not to sentence them. Assuming that normal judges and policemen want neither to be caught nor sentenced, according to the Golden Rule, it follows that they ought not to arrest or sentence others. The Golden Rule also requires, and students might like this, that teachers not give flunking grades to students even if they deserve it. If you were a student you would not want to be flunked. But it also seems to require that a student get a better grade than those who do not deserve it, because if you were a student and deserved a better grade, you would want a better grade. So it now seems that the Golden Rule is really pretty useless if you are trying to find out what you ought to do.

The OED suggests that the rule of reciprocity is called “golden” because of its “inestimable utility,” that is, because it is supremely useful. Singer thinks that the Golden Rule’s extensive cross-cultural presence lends plausibility to its status as a “fundamental ethical truth.” In sharp contrast, Gert demonstrates that, when read “literally,” the Golden Rule is “a useless and pointless rule to use as a guide to your conduct....” From one perspective, the Golden Rule appears as universal and supremely useful. From another perspective, it has no value as a guide to actual behavior. The contrast between these assessments can help to shape the agenda for our collective work on this project.

The conflicting views outlined above show that the Golden Rule is easier to endorse than to enact. As a general moral principle or as an abstract statement of ethical value, the Golden Rule makes intuitive sense and enjoys wide acceptance across religions and cultures. But the generality

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and abstraction that enable its broad appeal make the Golden Rule problematic as a directive for practical action. Indeed, on Gert’s analysis, it is possible that the Golden Rule must be read figuratively or very expansively in order to be used, surely a challenge for any basic moral principle. The Golden Rule can be accepted unambiguously but applied only after considerable reflection and qualification. The Golden Rule’s basic formulations—either positive or negative—require the constraints of context and interpretation to achieve the “inestimable utility” the OED ascribes to the rule. Consider the following problem: The core value of the Golden Rule is reciprocity, but the positive formulation of the Golden Rule (“Do unto others...”) is unclear about how reciprocity actually works. Are we to conceive the other in terms of ourselves, ourselves in terms of the other, some combination of the two? This ambiguity is particularly troublesome if we and the other inhabit conflicting moral universes. To achieve reciprocity, does the rule require or imply that we should respect moral positions we oppose and shape our actions around them? For instance, must a person who is “pro-life” imagine herself as holding the values of someone who is “pro-choice” in determining whether or not to close a women’s health clinic in which abortions are performed? Since the “pro-choice” person would not want the clinic closed, should the “pro-life” person allow it to remain open? Is the basic reference point of the Golden Rule the actor or the recipient of the action, the self or the other? Does the Golden Rule allow me to “do” what I believe to be good “unto others” who do not want it or value it because I would want that good “done” to me? Are there limits to the reciprocity of the Golden Rule? If so, then in what sense is the Golden Rule a general moral principle?

This kind of conundrum is not merely theoretical. There are historical examples with real-life consequences. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, abolitionist and proslavery Christian clergymen debated the question of slavery. Abolitionist preachers used the Golden Rule to argue that slavery should be eliminated. Proslavery ministers—who did not regard slavery as a sin—employed the Golden Rule to support the very opposite position. They argued in essence that ending slavery would disrupt the social and economic order and harm more people than it would benefit. On this view, rather than mandating the abolition of slavery, “The Golden Rule demands that free men ask themselves what they would consider reasonable and just if they were slaves.”9 James Henry Thornwell put it bluntly: “We are not bound to render unto them what they might in fact desire. Such a rule would transmute morality into caprice. But we are bound to render unto them what they have a right to desire—that is, we are bound to render unto

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them what is “just and equal.””\textsuperscript{10} For Thornwell and others, apparently, rather than eliminating slavery, the reciprocity of the Golden Rule meant understanding how to endure it. In the end, the Golden Rule served the arguments of both sides, and the matter was settled on the battlefield rather than in the pulpit. This episode seems to add weight to Gert’s concern about the rule’s practical value in guiding conduct. If the Golden Rule could not help resolve the question of slavery, what kind of moral dilemmas can it actually settle?

The conundra described above are not unique in scholarship on the Golden Rule; they are part of a tradition of honest intellectual scrutiny of the rule’s meaning. That the basic formulation of the Golden Rule so easily generates and fails to solve basic problems about its practicality suggests that our project should focus less on the rule itself than on the preconditions, contexts, settings, frameworks, stipulations, etc. that give the Golden Rule its concrete and substantive significance. To appreciate and evaluate the Golden Rule’s importance, it will help to understand the constraints that focus its meaning and the circumstances to and in which it actually applies. Jeffrey Wattles suggests that “The Golden Rule...has more than a single sense. It is not a static, one-dimensional proposition with a single meaning to be accepted or rejected, defended or refuted. Nor is its multiplicity chaotic. There is enough continuity of meaning in its varied uses to justify speaking of the golden rule.”\textsuperscript{11} Freshly examining the Golden Rule’s “utility” in a broad comparative and analytic context can help us chart in detail the Golden Rule’s “varied uses,” sharpen our picture of its “continuity of meaning,” and assess if, how, and why the Golden Rule matters in human cultures and societies.

To achieve these elemental scholarly goals, we might organize our collective investigation of the Golden Rule around four basic and fairly broad topics: In the religion, culture, or philosophy you study, What does the Golden Rule say? What does the Golden Rule mean? How does the Golden Rule work? How does the Golden Rule matter? The questions listed beneath each topic are suggestive rather than normative. Their goal is to stimulate inquiry. It is difficult to devise a single set of questions that will work equally well in the study of religions and in philosophy. The questions below probably are better suited to the former than the latter. That is in part a reflection of the author’s intellectual limitations and in part because this is the first collective study of the Golden Rule in the context of comparative religion. Treating each religion similarly will yield useful comparative results. The questions assume that a religion is a system with interacting and mutually reinforcing elements. One goal of our study is to show how the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Wattles, \textit{ibid.}, p. 5
Golden Rule works in a discrete religion, how it affects and is affected by the system of which it is a part. It is hoped that philosophers will be able to adapt the questions’ concerns to their own materials. Let us now turn to the four topics.

I. What does the Golden Rule say?

In the religion, culture, or philosophy you study, is the Golden Rule formulated positively, negatively, or both? Is it formulated as a narrative, a work of art, a ritual practice? Why was this formulation chosen? What is the semantic range of its language and formulation? How does the Golden Rule emerge and where does it appear? If the Golden Rule is not specifically mentioned or formulated, are there approximations?

II. What does the Golden Rule mean?

A. Literature
In the materials you study, is there a literary context for the Golden Rule? If you study a religion, does it appear in the religion’s scripture? If there is a literary context, what in that context provokes the Golden Rule’s appearance? Does the literary context constrain the Golden Rule’s meaning by, for example, glossing it or embedding it in a highly particular setting or circumstance?12

B. Interpretation
How important is the Golden Rule in the interpretive tradition of the religion, culture, or philosophy you study? How much interpretive attention does the Golden Rule receive relative to other doctrines, practices, precepts, etc.? How has the Golden Rule been interpreted and applied over time? Does the tradition advance some understanding(s) of the Golden Rule at the expense of others? Does the interpretive tradition distinguish between reciprocity and retaliation? Does it (and if so, how) constrain excessive or ridiculous inferences from the Golden Rule, i.e., the idea that evildoers should not be punished because we, in their shoes, would not like to be punished?

III. How does the Golden Rule work?

A. Social Consequence
In the materials you study, to which segments of society is the Golden Rule directed? Does it apply uniformly across genders and social classes? Is it limited to a particular group, or does it apply to people in general? Does it presuppose literacy or a certain level of education? Who is the author of or authority behind the Golden Rule? Does it apply all the time or only in particular circumstances?

B. Actor and Recipient
Who are the Golden Rule’s assumed actor and recipient of the action? Does the Golden Rule assume that the actor is an autonomous moral agent whose subjective and individual desires are the basis for the actions taken toward the other? Alternatively, are the actor’s desires prescribed by some other authority? Does the actor determine how s/he wants or would want to be treated, or does the tradition supply that content? Does the Golden Rule apply to a deity or other superhuman beings?

C. Reflexivity and Reciprocity
Does the Golden Rule include reflexivity as a component of reciprocity, i.e., the notion of treating others as you would treat yourself? In the materials you study, is the Golden Rule equivalent to the precept to ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”? Is the Golden Rule’s basic reference point the actor or the recipient of the action, the self or the other? Does the Golden Rule presuppose or require empathy? Are there limits to the Golden Rule’s conception of reciprocity?

D. Violence and Oppression
Does the Golden Rule sanction violence or oppression against others? If so, which circumstances make such behavior acceptable?

IV. How does the Golden Rule matter?

A. Systemic Significance
How important is the Golden Rule in the system of the religion or culture you study? Is it central or peripheral? How does the Golden Rule work with the religion’s other component parts—

parts we often classify as myths, beliefs, rituals, ethics, etc.—to produce coherence? What are the Golden Rule’s prerequisites? What must be assumed in order for the Golden Rule to make sense both as a principle and a potential or actual practice? Do other teachings and practices depend on the Golden Rule? Does the religion or culture identify specific teachings or actions as particular applications of the Golden Rule? Are there other rules, precepts, or values that always supersede the Golden Rule? Within the religion or culture, are there major alternatives or challenges to the Golden Rule?

B. Consequences of Failure and Success
What are the consequences of ignoring, disobeying, or otherwise failing to implement the Golden Rule? Are there social sanctions, negative religious judgments, punishment in the next world, etc.? What are the consequences of fulfilling the Golden Rule? Are rewards or benefits promised or assumed?

C. Exceptions
Does the religion, culture, or philosophy you study justify flouting the Golden Rule? Is it permissible to treat others as you do not want them to treat you? How are exceptions to the Golden Rule justified, and what do the exceptions reveal about the importance of the Golden Rule in the system you study?

At the conclusion of his book on the Golden Rule, Jeffrey Wattles points to the stakes in the collective work of this project. He writes, “The rule is an expression of human kinship, the most fundamental truth underlying morality.” In an age in which people across the planet encounter one another—both in person and electronically—with unprecedented concentration and intensity, and in which technology has made our capacity to inflict pain and death on one another easier than ever before, and in which engagement with difference is an unavoidable and often uncomfortable fact of everyday life, understanding the nature of our “human kinship” is an essential activity of mind and spirit. To such activity, nothing could be more relevant than the critical study of the Golden Rule.

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14 Wattles, *ibid.*, p. 188
15 I am grateful to Stephen Sapp, Michael McCullough, Irene Koukios, and Dexter Callender—all colleagues at the University of Miami—for helpful criticism and conversation. My thanks also go to Eugene Genovese for good counsel and wise perspective.
The Golden Rule is very much on the minds of neuro-psychologists these days; it is “blowing in the wind.” The New York Times magazine of January 13, 2008, has an article by Steven Pinker, professor of psychology at Harvard University, entitled: “The Moral Instinct,” or, framed as a question: ”What Makes Us Want To Be Good?” Pinker cites many recent studies dealing with this subject, including: *The Happiness Hypothesis* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), by Jonathan Haidt, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, who focuses on the dynamics of reciprocity, and emphasizes its downside, “vengeful reciprocity.” Finally, Donald W. Pfaff, professor and head of the Laboratory of Neurobiology and Behavior at Rockefeller University, has contributed an in-depth study entitled: *The Neuroscience of Fair Play; Why We (Usually) Follow the Golden Rule* (New York: Dana Press, 2007). Pfaff’s findings will prove to be highly relevant to the applications of the Golden Rule in the Hebrew Bible. A perusal of the list of publications by the same Dana Press will attest to the degree of attention being given to this subject.

All of the above scholars address essentially the same question. Is the value we place on fairness, on putting ourselves in another’s place, a cultural phenomenon, something we learn through experience in the human environment, or is it innate, part of “human nature,” and traceable to the evolution of the human brain? As might be expected, most neuro-psychologists end up somewhere in the middle. They affirm, on the one hand, that the universally attested Golden Rule, and the “moral instinct” that it expresses are, in a manner resembling Noam Chomsky’s “universal grammar,” mapped in the human nervous system. A the same time, they point out that the moral temperament reflects the widely varying effects of environment and experience. Especially enlightening is Pfaff’s chapter 10, entitled: “Balancing Act,” where he states:
In the human central nervous system, the processes that underlie ethical behaviors must be balanced against the mechanisms that cause aggressive behaviors… What is the “balancing” I am talking about and how is it reached? Why are some people civil and friendly whereas others are more prone to hostility? And what about the social behaviors and responses in between? I believe that the balance depends crucially on a person’s temperament. In turn, temperament depends on the complex mixture and interaction—unique for each individual—of genetic influences and environmental forces. (pp. 161-162, with omissions).

The ethical objective is to achieve balance between contrasting genetic processes, and Pfaff goes furthest in illustrating just how environmental factors affect the genetic package that we bring with us into life. Another of Pfaff’s insights is also worth mentioning before tracing the theme of fairness in biblical literature. In his chapter 5, entitled: “Losing One’s Self“ (pp. 61-79), Pfaff explains why the brain of a person who is considering harming another might reject the idea, and refrain from carrying it out. He speaks of a “blurring process,” whereby a person loses the sense of difference between the self and the other, and begins to identify with the target. It is this blurring of identity that is expressed in biblical and other ancient statements to the effect that one should be sensitive as to how the other feels.

The Hebrew Bible on Human Cognition

For their part, the ancients knew relatively little about the neurological functions of the brain. In fact, there is no term for “brain” in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew word mōah, which came to mean “brain” in post-biblical Hebrew, occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, in Job 21:24, within the phrase “and the marrow of his bones” (ûmōah ’asmôtâw, and cf. the related term mēhim “fatty (animals)” in Ps 66:15). In the biblical mentality, it was the heart, Hebrew lēb, lēbah, and also other internal organs such as the kidneys and the liver, which were variously identified as seats of both emotion and cognition. Very often in Biblical Hebrew usage, words for “heart” are best taken to mean “thoughts, feelings.” It is the heart that either “knows” (the Hebrew verb yāda’) or fails to know what is right and what is wrong. Similarly, Hebrew nepeš, the word usually translated “soul” more accurately means “breathing mechanism, esophagus,” and pars pro toto “the person, the life,” even “feelings.” Hebrew nepeš likewise locates the center of emotion and thought in the upper thorax,
and neck, not in the cranium. One could also cite the transactions on the Hebrew word *rûah* “wind, spirit” in the same vein.

It is true that certain organs located in the head have a role in human behavior. Thus, the eyes either perceive or fail to perceive, just as the ears either heed or fail to heed. Thus, Deut 29:3:

> And yet, Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear until this very day.

Or, Isa 6:10:

> Encase the ‘heart’ of this people with fat, stop-up his ears, and avert his eyes, lest seeing with his eyes and hearing with his ears, he will (also) discern with his ‘heart’; then repent, and heal himself.”

I dwell on the above facts of language because the best method of investigating biblical notions of human behavior is precisely, to follow the philological trail. It is the human mind, represented as the heart, which most often accounts for human behavior, especially in the ethical dimension, where choice and decision are crucial. To illustrate usage of Hebrew *lēb, lēbāb* to connote thought and emotion in the process of balancing between aggression and ethical conduct we had best examine two paraphrases on human behavior in the flood narratives of Genesis. They explain that God had decided to undo his creation because of violence by humans (and animals!), which had overrun the earth. Thus, Gen 8:21:

> Then Yahweh said in his thoughts (lit. “to his heart”): I will never again curse the earth on account of the human being, for the predisposition (yeser) of the ‘heart’ of the human being is evil from his youth; (therefore), I will never again destroy all living things as I have (now) done.

Cf. the slightly expanded statement in Gen 6: 5-6:

> Then Yahweh saw that the evil (perpetrated) by the human being is extensive, and that the entire predisposition (yēser) of his ‘heart’s’ intentions is only evil all day long. So, Yahweh regretted that he had made the human being on the earth, and he became agitated in his ‘heart.’

So, first off, we note that God also has a heart, which is also the seat of his cognition! The key term is Hebrew yēser, usually translated “inclination.” which has here been rendered “predisposition.” In Hebrew, the verb yāsar means “to form, mold,” and the noun yōsēr actually means “potter, one who molds” (Isa 29:16, 64:7). Like a potter, God molded the human being from earth. On this basis, yēser would
mean “something molded,” and when the Bible says that the human being possesses a yēser it is saying that he is formed so as to behave in a certain way, that this is his “makeup,” hence: “predisposition.” Another expressive translation would be “temperament,” taken to mean a sustained pattern of traits. This is perhaps the closest we come in biblical literature to the notion of the innate, or genetic. To put it in neuro-psychological terms, God spared Noah from extinction because Noah had balanced his aggressive yēser with his moral instinct; he was saddīq tāmīm “faultlessly just” (Gen 6:8).

The narrative of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2: 4-3:24) also comes to mind. It is replete with toned-down mythological themes, and has been interpreted in diverse ways, so that any particular line of interpretation inevitably omits alternative possibilities. In the present context, we can see this tale as an etiology on human nature, intended to explain how the human animal came to be as we humans are. More specifically, how is it that human beings became capable of knowing the difference between good and evil, a way of saying that we possess a “moral instinct?”

God had planted a garden with beautiful trees, including the tree of knowledge (Hebrew da’at, from the verb yāda‘ “to know),” and the tree of life (Gen 2:9). Note the admonition to Adam, before Eve had been constructed from his rib:

Then Yahweh-Elohim commanded the human being (=Adam) as follows: Of every tree of the garden you may surely eat. However, from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for on the day you eat from it you shall surely die (Gen 2:16-17).

Later, after woman had been created, the two creatures disobeyed God’s command, and ate of the forbidden fruit. In the course of tempting them, the snake had the following to say:

Then the snake said to the woman: You mots assuredly will not die. It is only that the Elohim knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened so that you will become like Elohim (or: “like divine beings”), knowing good and evil ( yod’e tob wara’-Gen 3: 4-5 ).

Once again, the eyes have a role in human behavior; opening the eyes becomes a way of describing awareness. It is as though the eyes receive a message and transfer it to the ‘heart.” This is exactly what happened, as we read further in Genesis 3. The point of the tale is that the human creature was initially animal-like, able only to obey or disobey and to be tempted by lovely appearances, but unable to make judgements
as to right and wrong. Previously, the two humans had seen the tree’s enticing beauty; but now that their eyes were opened, they perceived the effects of eating its fruit. We are to understand that the outcome of the story places the human creature only slightly below the divine, to paraphrase Psalm 8; humans are mortal like animals, but possessed of “knowledge” like Elohim. They know right and wrong and are capable of fulfilling the Golden Rule.

The Classic, Biblical Formulation of the Golden Rule

Biblical pronouncements on fairness and reciprocity show the Golden Rule to be complex in its realization. It generates spirals of action and reaction, rewards and penalties, and hardly simplifies human behavior. This is true of the covenant relationship between Israel and God, so often characterized as turbulent and disappointing. Perhaps the clearest paradigm of reciprocity in the Hebrew Bible is the vow, Hebrew neder, a conditional, covenantal agreement between an individual Israelite and his God, usually with cultic accompaniments. As expected, reciprocity is an active principle of biblical law, a predicate of justice, and a tenet of wisdom. The virtues of fairness pervade the biblical ethos. It was decided, therefore, to focus on selected epitomes, of diverse types, which provide insight into the applications of the Golden Rule in the Hebrew Bible. We begin by examining the formal statement of reciprocity, the positive commandment: “Love your fellow as yourself,” in Hebrew: we’āhabtā lerē’akā kāmōkā (Lev 19: 18). It is the comparative “as yourself, equal to yourself” that conveys the notion of reciprocity, and we will observe elsewhere that the prefixed, comparative particle, Hebrew: k-, regularly appears in statements to the same effect. To understand the import of this statement we must put it in context.

Leviticus 19 opens with the words: “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” This mandate is addressed to the entire community of Israel, and expresses what in theological circles is known as imitatio dei “emulation of God.” The chapter then proceeds to specify what the Israelites, individually and collectively, are instructed to do as to fulfill the commandment to be holy, and in the process, presents a portrait of a holy community. Leviticus 19 is the centerpiece of what is known as the Holiness Code, consisting of Leviticus 17-27. In its entirety, the Holiness Code is one of three, major collections of laws in the Torah, the earliest being the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20-23). At that point, disagreement arises as to whether the
Deuteronomic code (Deuteronomy 12-28, also with additions) or the Holiness Code comes next. It is the view taken here that Leviticus is a response to Deuteronomy, which preceded it, and that the Holiness Code is a primary statement of priestly law, composed in the post-exilic period, beginning in the late 6th century B.C.E. It reflects the situation of the restored Jewish community in the Land of Israel during the Achemenid-Persian period after the end of the Babylonian Exile, when Cyrus, the Great, in 538 B.C.E. had issued a charter granting the Judeans the right to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem.

In its totality, the Holiness Code outlines the priestly agenda, and at times incorporates earlier legal and social norms, often paraphrased, while also innovating and reforming law and worship. It opens with a statement on the proper sacrificial worship of the God of Israel (Leviticus 17), followed by regulations governing the family (Leviticus 18 and 20), and affecting the priesthood (Leviticus 21). These are followed by a festival calendar (Leviticus 23), and by laws of land tenure, indebtedness and taxation within a temple-centered institutional structure (Leviticus 25 and 27). Additional particulars are dealt with elsewhere in the Holiness Code. Within this larger framework, Leviticus 19 functions as a mini-Torah, covering areas of activity that concern the entire community, not only the priesthood. At least six of the Ten Commandments are resonated in Leviticus 19, a feature already noted in the Sifra, an ancient Midrash on Leviticus.

Leviticus 19 is quite clearly a compilation, at times repetitious and resumptive, wherein cultic dictates alternate rather abruptly with ethical imperatives. In the first category, we find emphasis on the banning of idolatry and forms of divination and magic associated with paganism. The ethical material, which predominates, is presented in clusters of divine dictates, each ending with the declaration: `anî YHWH “I am Yahweh,” or a longer form “I am Yahweh, your God.” The first series of ethical-legal statements covers verses 11-12, the second, verses 13-14, the third, verses 15-16, and the last in this part of the chapter covers verses 17-18. It is in verse 18 that the commandment to love one’s neighbor occurs, and one has the impression that this statement was intended to cap the preceding clusters, all the way back to verse 11 Thus, Lev 19: 11-18:

You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God. I am Yahweh. You shall not defraud your fellow (rēʾakā) . You shall not
commit robbery. The wages of a day-laborer shall not remain with you until (the next) morning. You shall not curse the deaf, or place a stumbling block in front of the blind. You shall be in fear of your God; I am Yahweh. You shall not render an unfair judgement; do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your neighbor (‘amîtekā) equitably. Do not deal basely with your kinsman. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow (rē’akā); I am Yahweh. Do not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your neighbor so that you will not incur guilt on his account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk Love your fellow (rē’akā) as yourself. I am Yahweh.

The terminology alternates between kinship terms and those we might call “social terms.” In the kinship group we find Hebrew `ah “brother, kinsman,” and `am “kinsfolk, clan, people.” The social terms are rē’a “fellow, associate, companion,” a positive term of wide distribution, and a second term that is virtually limited to Leviticus, namely, (‘amît) “neighbor” literally, a person whom one regularly encounters. It is the term rē’a that commands our attention in particular. Although it is not a kinship term it applies in the present context only to Israelites., a conclusion that is not necessitated by etymology, but rather indicated by usage in all three law collections in the Torah. These texts are all addressed to the Israelites, specifically, and their prescriptions are binding only on Israelites. I stress the social context of Hebrew rē’a because it is the key to understanding what comes later on in Lev 19: 33:

And if a resident alien (Hebrew gēr) should dwell with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The gēr who dwells with you shall be to you as one of your own natives, and you shall love him as yourself (we’āhabtā lō kāmōkā), for you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord, your God.

We note the same syntax, expressive of reciprocity, as obtained in the commandment applicable to fellow Israelites. If we backtrack to Lev 19: 9-10, we read that the gleanings of vines and farms must be left for “the poor and the gēr.” So it is that if an enactment is meant to apply to non-Israelites as well, this must be made explicit. Hebrew gēr allows of diverse definitions, depending largely on context and perspective, but in Torah law it necessarily connotes a non-Israelite, and evokes the memory of when the Israelites were, themselves, aliens in Egypt, and had to rely on the rulers and native population for protection under the law. Leviticus 19 is just one of many sources that require care for, and fair treatment of non-Israelites who were attached to Israelite communities.
It would be worthwhile, at this point, to probe our understanding of the Hebrew verb ōhab “to love.” It is only to be expected that verbs with this meaning in any language will exhibit far-ranging connotations. Closest to usage in Leviticus 19 is Deut 10:17-19:

For Yahweh, your God, is God of the gods, and Lord of the lords, the God who is great, heroic, and awesome; who does not show favoritism nor accept a bribe. He takes up the suit of the widow and orphan, and loves the gēr, giving him bread and clothing. You (too) shall love the gēr, for you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt.

The repeated references to the Egyptian experience (cf. Exod 22:20) epitomize empathy, the placing of one’s self in another’s place, most clearly spelled out in Exod 23:9, from the Book of the Covenant:

Nor shall you oppress a gēr, for you know (yeda’tem) the feelings (nepeš) of the gēr, since you were resident aliens in the Land of Egypt.

To love someone, in these terms, means to be kind and caring, and to be fair. It should strike us as significant that in the very commandment to love the resident alien the Torah is mandating reciprocity; the Israelites might have perished as a group had the Egyptians not granted them the basics of life, at least for a time. In effect, an Israelite who did what the Holiness Code prescribed, and avoided doing what it prohibited, was acting with love toward his fellow Israelite, and toward the resident alien, as well. The list of “do’s and don’t’s” in Lev 19:11-18 (resumed with some interruptions in Lev 19:26-36) effectively defines reciprocity by example, and teaches that a holy community is one in which the expectation of fairness is fulfilled.

Some Epitomes of Reciprocity in Biblical Literature

The theme of reciprocity in biblical literature can be traced in several ways, both as regards relations on the human level, and as a factor in the human-divine encounter. This theme is pervasive, and cuts across all literary genres and agendas. Very often, key concepts will be conveyed by specific terms of reference, so that an exploration of the language of reciprocity will lead us to an understanding of how it was perceived.

Stories told and retold often reveal more about the ethos of a society than its laws and formal beliefs. Here we will contrast two narratives, each of which embodies notions of reciprocity, but in different ways: the story of Ruth (in the Book of Ruth), and the Joseph Cycle (in Genesis 37, 39-50). Both of these narratives address multiple themes, to be sure, but the principle of reciprocity operates drives them quite noticeably. The story of Ruth epitomizes the blessings of kindness Hebrew *hesed*. Simply put, it is a story in which kindness shown by one human being to another is warmly reciprocated, by the other person and by God. The Joseph Cycle, in contrast, shows how the expectation to be treated fairly, when it meets with disappointment, can morph into anger and vengeance. Joseph retaliates to the limit against his brothers until both he and they come to realize how close they were to tragedy. At that point, Joseph, the originally aggrieved party, desists, after his brothers confess their guilt. Reciprocity had run its course!

**a) The Story of Ruth.** Ruth was a Moabite woman married to a Judean from Bethlehem, named Elimelekh, who had migrated to Moab with his family during a famine. Later, when her Judean mother-in-law, Naomi, decided to return from Moab to Bethlehem after her husband and two sons had all died, Ruth returned with her, pledging never to leave her. This was Ruth’s first act of *hesed*:

> Wherever you go, I shall go, and wherever you lodge, I shall lodge. Your kinsfolk are my kinsfolk, and your God is my God. Wherever you die, I shall die, and there shall I be buried. Thus and more may Yahweh do to me if anything but death separates me from you (Ruth 1:16-17).

With her sons gone, there would have been no way for Naomi to secure the continuity of her family or to hold on to her late husband’s estate, but with Ruth returning with her, there was a chance. Ruth could marry a Judean and bear children who would carry on the “name,” which is what eventuated, after all.

Enter Boaz, a family relative, who showed *hesed* to Ruth from the outset. Both as a *gō’ēl* “restorer,” whose duty it is to redeem family land and keep it in the family, and undoubtedly as a romantic figure, Boaz maneuvers affairs so as to marry Ruth. Here is a bit of dialogue between Boaz and Ruth:

> Then she (= Ruth) said to him: “How is it that I have found favor in your eyes, since I am (only) a foreign woman?” Then Boaz replied, saying to her: “I have been duly informed of all that you have done for your mother-in-law after your husband’s death; how you abandoned your father and mother and
the land of your birth, and came to a people whom you did not know before. May Yahweh fully pay the reward of your deeds (yešallēm YHWH poʾalēk), and may your recompense be complete from Yahweh, God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought shelter” (Ruth 2:10-12).

The key term in this exchange is the Hebrew noun pōʾal, whose meaning is subtle. It often comes as the object of šillēm “to pay out,” as here, and as such, connotes both “act, deed,” and “the consequence of the deed”- either reward, as in the present case, or more often in biblical usage -punishment, conceived as the inevitable consequence of misdeeds. In other words, it expresses reciprocity on both the human-to-human level, and in the human-divine encounter, and is central to the wisdom tradition (Jer 50:29, Prov 24:10, 29- and see further). The story of Ruth expresses the symmetry between human and divine kindness, as if to say that God also holds to the Golden Rule!

b) The Joseph Cycle (Genesis 37, 39-50). The cycle of stories about Joseph and his brothers is the closest we come to a prose novel in biblical literature. The plot centers on vengeful reciprocity on the human level, as the unwitting actors play-out the roles assigned to them by a watchful deity who has his own agenda. As the plot “thickens” there are repeated incidents of reciprocity. The brothers set the process in motion by punishing Joseph for his egocentric dreams and disloyal behavior; they sell him into slavery in Egypt. Although Judah and Rueben (symbolizing southern Judah and Northern Israel, respectively) intervened to prevent fratricide, the separation of Joseph from his family, and the lies told about his fate, aggrieve the Patriarch, Jacob, so that reciprocity has already exceeded proportionality. The effects of action and reaction by the brothers on their father are repeatedly emphasized, making the point that vengeful reciprocity often outpaces its intended targets, and harms third parties as well (Genesis 37).

Meanwhile, in Egypt, while in the household of the royal courtier, Potiphar, Joseph spurns the sexual advances of the courtier’s wife. Here is what Joseph says to her:

Behold! Mylord knows nothing about how I manage the household, and he has placed everything he owns under my control. There is no one greater in this household than I, and he has denied me nothing except for you, in that you are his wife. How, then, could I commit this great evil by sinning against God? (Gen 39:8-9)
To betray a trust is not only a sin against others, it is a sin against God. Joseph remains committed to fairness, both out of pragmatic considerations, no doubt, but also out of regard for mutuality. As a result, God is with him, so that even when he is not believed and is falsely imprisoned, he fairs well. Soon after, Joseph brought closure to the two courtiers imprisoned with him by interpreting their dreams, which was an act of kindness on his part. For two years, however, his kindness was forgotten but then, the courtier whom Pharaoh spared just as Joseph had predicted, recalled the wisdom of the Hebrew youngster and recommended him to Pharaoh, who had just experienced frightening dreams of his own. The rewards of reciprocity are often slow in coming, but soon thereafter, Joseph was appointed viceroy over all Egypt as that country prepared for the oncoming famine (Genesis 39-41).

Returning to the primary plot of the Joseph Cycle, we see the brothers engaging Joseph under radically different circumstances, as the once spurned brother begins his cycle of “payback,” of vengeful reciprocity. Without reviewing all of the interactions in the story, we can refer to key points, as the brothers make repeated trips to Egypt to purchase grain. The brothers bow down before Joseph in fulfillment of his dreams (see Gen 42:6). When Joseph, unrecognized by his brothers, orders them to bring Benjamin with them next time they come for grain, here is what they say to one another after pleading unsuccessfully with Joseph:

Then they said to each other: We are truly culpable in the matter of our brother, when we perceived his inner anguish as he pleaded with us, but did not take heed. It is for this reason that all of this anguish has come upon us (Gen 42: 21).

In a punitive frame of mind, Joseph even accuses the brothers of breaking reciprocity be stealing objects of value. Here is what his men are to say to the brothers when they catch up with them:” Why have you repaid (šillamtem) evil in place of good?” (Gen 44:4)

After successive acts of vengeance, Joseph finally broke down, and was reconciled with his brothers. In the several exchanges that took place in the interim, the effect of Joseph’s cruel actions on their father, Jacob, is referred to repeatedly. To lose Benjamin after believing that he had lost Joseph would be too much for the old Patriarch. The reader agonizes as Joseph persists in tormenting his brothers, time after time, by threatening to hold Benjamin hostage, so that we cannot miss the point. Just
as they had sought to separate Joseph from his father and family, so was he now seeking to separate Benjamin (Genesis 43-44).

The chain of vengeful reciprocity is broken when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers. This is part of what he says:

Now then, be not distressed, or reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for God sent me as a life-sustaining force in advance of you…Now, then, it is not you who sent me here, but rather God (Gen 45: 5, 8).

The theme of forgiveness is repeated later on, after Jacob’s death, when the brothers feared that Joseph would once again try act to avenge himself against them. When Joseph’s brothers learned that their father had died, they said to each other:

“What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us, and surely repays us for all the evil that we paid him (‘ašer gāmalnū ʿōtô)?” Then they sent a message to Joseph as follows: ”Your father left instructions before his death as follows: ‘So shall you say to Joseph: Please! Pardon the sin of your brothers and their offense, for they repaid you (kī gemālūkā) evil’. Now, then, pardon the sin of the servants of the God of your father.” (Gen 50: 15- 17).

The Hebrew verb gāmal “to pay, repay” connotes reciprocity. It is on this basis that it often assumes the meaning “to repay”- both out of a sense of indebtedness, and out of a desire to penalize or retaliate. Thus, Prov 3:30:

Do not dispute with another person without cause, if he has done nothing to harm you” (‘im lo’ gemālekā rā‘āh).

In other words, do unto others as they have done unto you! Usage of Hebrew gāmal suggests that the recipient of the kindness (or the harmful act) deserves it, and what is more, it may at times imply that the kindness done to a person exceeds just deserts; that it was granted out of love, or compassion (e.g. Isa 63:7). In fact, the virtuous wife of Prov 31:12 may be a case in point: “She repaid him with goodness (gemālathū tôb), not evil, all the days of her life.”

Reciprocity is clearly indicated by use of comparative particles in statements with the verb gāmal, as for instance, in Ps 103:9:

He (=God) has not dealt with us according to our offenses (kahattāʾēnû), nor has he repayed us (gāmal ʿālēnû) according to our sins (kaʾawōnōtēnû).

A quid pro quo calculation pursuant to the Golden Rule would have left us much worse off! A cognate of Hebrew gāmal is Akkadian gamālu which, in its verbal forms, is consistently  irenic and beneficent “to be obliging, to perform a kind act, to
come to an agreement” (Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, vol.5, “G,” 21-23). Both Hebrew and Akkadian attest nominal derivatives, Hebrew gemûl, and Akkadian gimillu, and related forms. (For Akkadian see Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, vol 5, “G” 73-75). More often than not, Akkadian gimillu bears a positive connotation, namely, “an act of kindness,” but in the combination gimilla turru literally: “to return the act, repay ” it assumes a negative connotation: “to wreak vengeance.” This is semantically equivalent to Hebrew hēšîb gemûl “to return payment, to repay,” namely, “to punish reciprocally, to avenge” (Ps 28:4, 94: 2, Prov 12;14, Lament 3:64, et cetera). In Hebrew generally, gemûl more often than not bears a negative connotation, and serves to expose the downside of reciprocity. Thus it is that the Joseph Cycle, like the story of Ruth, epitomizes reciprocity, and utilizes key biblical terms of reference that convey this principle, in both its positive and negative effects.

b) Reciprocity in the Wisdom Tradition

1) Upholding the Golden Rule: Wise Counsel

Do not withhold good from one who deserves it, when you have the power to do it (for him). Do not say to your fellow (lerē ḡâkā): ”Come back again; I’ll give it to you tomorrow,” when you actually have it with you. Do not devise harm against your fellow (rē ḡâkā) who lives trustfully with you. Do not quarrel with a person for no cause, when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a lawless person, or choose any of his ways. For the devious person is an abomination to Yahweh, but he bonds with the straightforward (yešārîm). The curse of Yahweh is upon the house of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous. At scoffers, he scoffs; but to the humble - he is gracious (Prov 3: 27-34).

This passage resonates with the Golden Rule of Leviticus 19. It speaks of the proper treatment of one’s re’a, urging the proverbial disciple to avoid doing quite precisely what the Holiness Code forbids. Of particular interest is the contrast drawn between various sorts of evildoers, and “the upright, straightforward”(yešārîm), a characterization often associated with fairness toward others.

2) God Holds to the Golden Rule

Therefore, thoughtful men, listen to me: Wickedness is anathema to El, and wrongdoing to Shaddai. For he (=God) fully pays a person the reward of his deeds (pō al ʿādām yešallem lô), and according to the conduct of a man he
provides for him. For El does not act wickedly, and Shaddai does not pervert justice (Job 34:10-12):

The belief that God will repay us according to our just deserts is here stated in wisdom terms, as a reasonable expectation. It comes as a response to the cynic, who has just been quoted as saying: “Man gains nothing by being in God’s favor” (Job 34:9). The speaker reassures us that this is not so; that man can count on God’s fairness, stated in the well-known reciprocal terms.

3) A Rite of Entry: The Ethical Agenda of Psalm 15.

Yahweh! Who may sojourn in your tent; who may dwell on your holy mountain? One who conducts himself innocently, and who acts justly, and acknowledges the truth in his heart. He has no slander on his tongue; he does no evil to his fellow (lerê êhûû), nor has he ever borne disgrace (for acts) against his neighbor. For whom a contemptible person is abhorrent, but who honors those who fear Yahweh. Who does not renege on his oath even when it has turned to his disadvantage. He does not lend his silver at interest, nor accept a bribe against the innocent. One who does these things shall never falter!

A comparison of the virtues and transgressions enumerated in Psalm 15 with the provisions of Leviticus 19 reveals, once again, how this cultic declaration of innocence resonates with the Golden Rule. It details the mandates of reciprocity, as well as its breaches.

4) A Plea for the Punishment of Those Who Violate the Golden Rule.

1”) Do not drag me along with the wicked, and with evildoers, who profess goodwill toward their fellows (rê êhem), but have malice in their heart. Pay them back according to their acts (kepo’alâm) and according to the evil of their deeds. According to their handiwork pay them; bring back on them their deserts (gemûlâm). For they do not understand Yahweh’s acts, nor his handiwork. May he tear them down, never to rebuild them (Ps 28:3-6)

The plea to be rescued from evildoers resonates with Leviticus 19, in its usage of Hebrew rê’â “fellow.” The language of reciprocity is once again echoed by Hebrew gemûl “payback,” and the noun form pô’al “deed, the consequences of a deed.” Evildoers do not love their fellows!

2”) How you boast of your evil, oh you (would-be) hero! El’s kindness seems never to end! Your tongue plots mischief, like a sharpened razor that
cuts furtively. You love (ʿāhābtā) evil more than good; the lie more than speaking truthfully. [Selah] You love (ʿāhābtā) all destructive words, treacherous speech. Surely, El will tear you down forever, he will break you and remove you from your tent. He will uproot you from the land of the living (Ps 52: 3-7).

The resonance with Leviticus 19 is to be found in repeated usage of the verb ʿāhab “to love.” This person loves the wrong things! The emphasis on deceitful speech also resonates with Leviticus 19, where many of the “don’t’s” refer to false, and foul speech. God allows evildoers to persist for a while, but punishes them in good time.

The Vow (Hebrew neder): A Paradigm of Reciprocity

It has already been mentioned that the neder “vow” exemplifies reciprocity as a major feature of Israelite culture. Jacques Berlinerblau, in his monograph, The Vow and Popular Religious Groups of Ancient Israel: A Philological and Sociological Inquiry (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) analyzes the consistent features of the biblical neder, noting that it is prompted by human initiative not divine command, and that it is essentially a private act, one available to both men and women. Vows are normally pronounced at a sacred site, and fulfilled by means of a follow-up cultic donation. The Hebrew Bible preserves several actual pronouncements of vows in addition to legislating the votive system, itself (Deut 23: 22-24, Numbers 30), and warning of its pitfalls (Qoheleth 5).

In effect, a vow is a pledge to give something to God if God does something for the donor, and functions in ways similar to a mutual oath. The timing and framing are significant. The neder is not a thanksgiving offering, because the donor pledges his gift in advance, before he achieves his desire. One is not obliged to pay it out (the verb šīllēm, again) until God comes through. The neder is entirely conditional in this respect, a feature marked by Hebrew ʿim “if.” There is no biblical statement limiting what one may request from God, and it is as if the vow, once pronounced, is binding on the deity. Nowhere is there any indication that the deity will refuse to accept a particular votive pledge, although he may deny cultic access altogether to those who displease him.

Most of what is said in the Hebrew Bible relates to whether or not the human partner to the negotiation comes through. What makes the neder relevant to the
present discussion of the Golden Rule is, precisely, that if fulfilled, it guarantees reciprocity. The donor gets what he seeks from God—a safe journey, victory in battle, or some other request, and then reciprocates by giving a gift to God. This relationship has been characterized in Latin as: *dō ut dēs* “I give in order that you will give.” This is actually the operative principle underlying all cultic activity and furthermore, it is basic to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Outside the Hebrew Bible we find references to sacral vows in West-Semitic sources—Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic, and Aramaic. Following are several actual votive pronouncements on record in the Hebrew Bible, and whose fulfillment is subsequently recorded:

1) The vow pronounced by Hannah, the previously barren mother of the prophet, Samuel, at the temple of Shiloh, during an annual pilgrimage, as reported in 1 Sam 1: 11:

> Then she pronounced a vow (*wattidōr neder*) saying: “Yahweh of Hosts! If (*`īm*) indeed, you take notice of your maid-servant’s affliction, and remember me and not forget your maid-servant, and give your maid-servant a male child, I will devote him to Yahweh for his entire lifetime, and no razor shall ever be put to his head.”

Hannah fulfilled her vow, after her son, Samuel, had been weaned. Yahweh had fulfilled his part of the negotiation, and pursuant to the terms of the *neder*, Hannah now handed her son over to the priest of Shiloh as a virtual Nazirite, to the accompaniment of sacrificial offerings and a Psalm of thanksgiving. Although there is no indication that Hannah required her husband’s prior consent, it is clear that he was supportive of her actions. Hannah’s statement of intent to the priest succinctly conveys reciprocity:

> “It is for this child that I prayed, and Yahweh has granted me my request that I made of him. Accordingly, I now lend him to Yahweh; for as long as he lives, he is on loan to Yahweh” Then he (= Elkanah, Hannah’s husband) bowed down before Yahweh (1 Sam 1: 27-28).

2) The vow pronounced by Jephthah before going into battle against the Ammonites (Jud 11: 30-31):

> Then Jephthah pronounced a vow (*wayyidar...neder*) to Yahweh, saying: “If (*`im*) indeed, you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the one who exits the doors of my house to greet me when I return safely from the Ammonites—he shall belong to Yahweh. I will offer him up as a burnt offering.”
As we know, the first one to greet him was his only child, his unnamed daughter. This report has raised eyebrows because, taken at face value, it sanctions human sacrifice, and has a horrendous outcome. One speculates that the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) constitutes, among other things, a repudiation of just such commitments. Regretting that he ever “opened his mouth,” Jephthah is compelled to fulfill his pledge after being granted victory, as we read further in Jud 11: 34, and following. Here is the expected statement of reciprocity, voiced by Jephthah’s daughter:

Then she said to him: “My father! You opened your mouth before Yahweh. Now, do to me what departed from your mouth, seeing as Yahweh has wrought vengeance on your behalf against your enemies, the Ammonites.”

Yahweh has fulfilled his part of the negotiation, and there is no escape, even at the cost of human life.

3) The vow pronounced by Jacob at Bethel after experiencing a theophany from Yahweh on his way to Haran (Gen 28: 20-22):

Then Jacob pronounced a vow (wayyiddar… neder), as follows: “If (‘im) if God will be close to me and protect me on this journey on which I am embarking, and provides me with food to eat and clothing to wear, so that I return safely to my father’s household, then Yahweh shall become my God. And this stone which I have erected as a stele shall become a House of God, and of everything you give me, I will set aside a tithe to you.

In effect, Genesis 28 is a hieros logos, namely, a narrative that confirms the sanctification of a cult-site, in this case the Northern Israelite temple at Bethel. What is more, the votive pronouncement can be taken to mean that Jacob had now become a devotee of Yahweh, whereas formerly he had worshipped El Shaddai (see Gen 28:3-4). We read about the fulfillment of the vow in Genesis 35, where the reciprocal nature of the negotiation is emphasized repeatedly.

Num 21: 2-3 report that the Israelites pronounced a vow after having been routed by the Canaanite king of Arad., pledging to devote conquered towns to Yahweh if he granted them victory. When they are victorious, the Israelites fulfill their pledge. There are additional vows on record, but the above examples should suffice to illustrate the theme of reciprocity as it is expressed in the votive negotiation.

Covenant as a Reciprocal Bond
In no subject have we seen more progress during the twentieth century than in the investigation of the biblical covenant as a form of agreement between designated parties, both on the human level and in the human-divine encounter. The reader will find an informative summary of biblical covenant traditions by Moshe Weinfeld in: *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Publishing Company, 1975, volume II: 253-279, under: “berith,” the most frequent Hebrew term for “covenant.” Weinfeld presents extensive comparative information from ancient Near Eastern societies that reveals both the ramifications of covenant–enactment in the Hebrew Bible, and its forms and phenomenology.

Interest here is limited to the observation that on analysis, the essential, biblical covenant is reciprocal. It is structured around the fulfillment of mutually binding obligations, undertaken by the parties to the covenant. It bears mention that in some of its versions, the covenants between Yahweh and the people of Israel are declared to represent an unconditional commitment by the deity to the survival of his people, Israel. We read of berit ‘ōlām “an eternal covenant” (e.g. Gen 17: 7-19, Exod 31: 16), one never to be annulled. Genesis 15, which turns out to be a relatively late text, records a covenant in which Yahweh promises the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants, with no stated conditions (see Gen 15: 18-21). Such covenant promises are best understood as progressive adaptations, not as representative of the basic, reciprocal structure of the biblical covenant. To understand that structure it would be best to begin by reviewing several individual covenants recorded in Genesis as part of the Patriarchal Narratives, after which we will examine the Epilogue to the Holiness Code, preserved in Leviticus 26.

1. Abraham and Abimelekh (Gen 21: - 22-34)

In order to resolve a dispute over a well that had been taken over by Abimelekh’s agents, Abraham and Abimelekh take an oath and “cut” a covenant between them. The formula kārat berīt “to ‘cut’ a covenant”, harks back to symbolic physical acts of incision performed as a way of confirming the an agreement. Previously, the two had an altercation involving Sarah, Abraham’s wife, during which the Philistine had occasion to learn through fear that Abraham was protected by divine providence (Genesis 20). This text may be outlined as follows:
a) Abimelekh expresses good will toward Abraham, and bids Abraham take an oath of friendship to him and to his descendants: This is what he says:

Therefore, swear to me here, by God, if (‘îm) you ever deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin; and that you will act toward me, and toward the land where you have sojourned, according to the (same) kindness (kahesed) that I have shown to you. Then Abraham said: “I will take the oath” (Gen 21: 22-23).

b) The text recapitulates, informing us that Abraham had aired a grievance to Abimelekh on the matter of the well that he, Abraham, had dug. Abraham was only a sojourner in Philistia, and reliant on the protection of the local ruler. For his part, Abimelekh protests that he knew nothing of the actions of his men in seizing the well, and that not even Abraham, himself, had ever complained about this before. At that point, the two cut a covenant, with Abraham offering sheep and cattle to Abimelekh as a gift of good will (Gen 21:24-27).

c) In what appears to be a parallel account (Gen 21: 28-34) this incident turns etiological, explaining the name Beer Sheba as “the well of the ‘seven’/ of the swearing,” a double entendre on the seven ewes that were set aside to celebrate the covenant, and on swearing the covenant oath (Hebrew hišššābâ‘ “to take an oath.”). Present concern focuses on the wording of the promissory oath, and on the comparative particle, prefixed k- in: kahesed. "according to the (same) kindness.” Abimelekh had released Abraham’s wife out of obedience to God, and had showered gifts on Abraham, inviting him to continue his sojourn and now Abraham was gifting him, and joining an alliance with him. What is clearly evident is that the pledges of the two parties to the covenant are regarded as reciprocal and conditional: “If (‘îm) you ever deal falsely” (Gen 21: 23)- the covenant is annulled!

2. Isaac and Abimelekh (Genesis 26).

Like father like son! Isaac perpetrates the same subterfuge on Abimelekh, who becomes aware that Rebekah is Isaac’s wife, not his sister, as he observes the two of them making love. Just in the nick of time, Rebekah is released, but there remain issues regarding wells that cause continuous friction between the two camps, added to the fact that the land could not sustain so much sheep and cattle. Once again, the two chieftains cut a covenant between them:

Then they said (= Abimelekh and his company): We see clearly that Yahweh has been with you, so we said: Let there be a sworn treaty (Hebrew `ālāh)
between (all of) us, between us and you, and let us cut a covenant with you. If (`im) you ever do any harm to us, seeing as we have not afflicted you, and seeing as we have always dealt kindly with you, then we shall send you away in peace. From now on, may you be blessed by Yahweh! Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. They arose early in the morning, and they swore to each other. Joseph sent them away and they parted from him in peace (Gen 26: 28-32).

In this “couplet” of Genesis 21, we are introduced to the Hebrew term `ālah “sworn treaty,” at times a synonym of berît (e.g. Deut 29:11, Ezek 16:59). It conveys a punitive nuance, alluding to what will happen if the covenant is violated.

3. Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31).

Against a background of subterfuge and deceit, Genesis 31 relates how Jacob escaped from his Aramean father-in-law, Laban, stealing away much of his livestock, along with his daughters, their children, and even the household, family gods, the teraphim. This happened after Jacob had outwitted Laban on the distribution of livestock claimed by Jacob as compensation for his years of service to him. Laban pursues Jacob and overtakes him in flight, threatening to wipe him out. The two exchange hostile accusations, and make irreconcilable claims, and then, to our surprise, Laban offers to cut a covenant with Jacob instead of going to war:

“Now, then, let us cut a covenant (berît), I and you, and let it serve as witness between me and you.” Then Jacob took a stone and erected it as a stele. Jacob then said to his kinsmen: “Gather up stones,” and they took stones and made a mound. Then they feasted there, at the mound. Laban called it “mound of testimony” [in Aramaic], whereas Jacob called it “mound of witness” [in Hebrew]. …(And as for the name) Mizpah, it is because he (=Laban) said: “May Yahweh monitor between me and you whenever we are out of sight of each other. If (`im) you ever abuse my daughters, or if (we `im) you ever take wives additional to my daughters. Though no one is here with us, beware! For God is a witness between me and you.” …” This mound is a witness, and this stele is a witness that I will not cross over to you past this mound, and that you will not cross over to me past this mound and stele with hostile intent. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us, their ancestral God.” Then Jacob swore by the deity revered by his father, Isaac. Then Jacob prepared a sacral feast and invited his kinsmen to eat bread. They partook of bread, and spent the night on the mountain Gen 31: 44-54, with omissions).

This unusually elaborate narrative has a busy agenda, with numerous themes interacting. It is an etiology of the land of Gilead, in Transjordan, justifying borders between the Arameans and the Israelites, and hence validating the Transjordanian
Israelite settlement of Gilead. Present concern focuses on the reciprocity that informs the treaty between Jacob and Laban, who are eponyms of the Israelites and Arameans, respectively. This passage introduces us to the importance of witnessing in covenant enactment, in addition to that of the covenant oath. God is witness when there are no human witnesses. At the same time, the emphasis on commemorative monuments brings us into the discipline of archeology.

4. The Epilogue to the Holiness Code (Leviticus 26): A Priestly Rendition of the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel

For a literary-historical analysis of Leviticus 26, the reader may wish to consult my interpretation of this text in: The JPS Torah Commentary, Leviticus, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989; Excursus 11, 275-281: “A Priestly Statement on the Destiny of Israel.” In its literary context, the Epilogue is addressed by Yahweh to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land, warning them that their right to the land was contingent on obedience to his commandments. Historically, it is best dated to the period of the Babylonian Exile and the early period of the return, in the late 6th century B.C.E. In effect, it is an explanation of the exile, ex eventu.

It is possible to show, based on earlier studies by H.L. Ginsberg, that as the Babylonian Exile progressed, and the prospect of return to the Israelite homeland seemed remote, the original version of the covenant promise was adapted so as to allow the exiles to hold onto their hopes. Of interest here is the primary Epilogue (Lev 26: 3-33a, 37b-38), which is a paradigm of the binary contrasts of blessing and curse, between the bountiful effects of obedience to the covenant versus violation of it, and a phased escalation of punishments if Israel persists in its disobedience. Here is how the blessing is presented:

If (‘im) you follow my laws and faithfully observe my commandments, I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit… and you shall eat your fill of bread, and dwell securely in the land. I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down with none to threaten…. You shall give chase to your enemies, who will fall before you by the sword…. I will turn to you in favor, and make you fertile and cause you to multiply. I will fulfill my covenant (berîtî) with you…. I shall establish my residence in your midst, and I will not reject you. I will continually walk in you midst. I will be your God, and you will be my people. I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, no longer to be their slaves. I broke the bars of your yoke, and lead you forth at full stature (Lev 26:3-13, with omissions).
The curse projects the opposite prospect, and portrays what will happen if the
Israelites persist in disobeying their God, and violate the covenant:

But if (we’im) if you do not heed me, and do not observe all these
commandments, and if (we’im) you reject my laws, and spurn my judgments,
so that you fail to perform all of my commandments, and you break my
covenant. Then I, in turn, will do the following to you ( Lev 26: 14-16a).

The Epilogue projects an antiphonal litany of horrible consequences, escalating the
catastrophe as it proceeds. Every blessing has its accursed counterpart, and there is
symmetry to the binary contrast. It is just such symmetry that expresses reciprocity.
How much more suffering would Israel have to endure before it could be restored to
its land! The cycle ends only when Israel atones for its sins, at which time God, who
had never given up on his people, will remember his covenant with the ancestors.

An Afterword

What we call the Golden Rule is truly a pivotal principle in human behavior.
Neuro-scientists have shown great interest in the ethical dimension of human
behavior, seeking to explain what leads certain people to harm others while others act
to be of help to others. Formulations of the Golden Rule, both positive and negative,
represent attempts to pinpoint what it is that we’re after in life. Most of all, we want to
be treated fairly; we expect reciprocity. What often escapes us is that reciprocity
imposes responsibilities on the self as well as the other. By examining biblical
epitomes and applications of reciprocity we become aware of what happens when
human beings fail to live up to their responsibilities. We might as well admit the truth
of what the Hebrew Bible illustrates. The Golden Rule works well for good people,
but not so well for the selfish and unkind. “For the paths of Yahweh are straight; the
righteous can walk on them, but the sinful stumble on them” (Hos 14:10).
THE GOLDEN RULE IN GRECO-ROMAN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

This chapter has as its purpose a general definition of reciprocity and the Golden Rule in Greco-Roman religion and philosophy. Addressing this question should involve a comprehensive survey of the evidence for the Golden Rule in the Greco-Roman period. What I attempt here is much more modest. The goal of this inquiry is first to throw some light on the classical origins of The Golden rule; secondly to offer examples illustrating its practice; and thirdly, to map the emergence of an ethics of reciprocity in the late Roman period. Initially, focus is upon the reciprocal virtues as they appear in Plato and Aristotle. This is followed by a study of reciprocity in selected Neoplatonists.

Two problems immediately face us. The first is that there are no words in Greek and Latin that translate into English as reciprocity. Moreover the earliest Greek and Latin terms used for ‘reciprocity’ arise out of a notion of economic exchange. Only later does there emerge in Latin the notion of ethical exchange as reciprocity. The second is that the general definition of the Golden Rule offered by Professor Green “that instructs us to treat others as we want, and would want, others to treat us,” is lacking in Archaic, Classical, and Greco-Roman sources. Indeed, an emotivist theory of reciprocity does not exist in Greco-Roman writings until late Pagan Antiquity and here only implicitly. However, out of such etymological and definitional incoherence, clarity eventually emerges. It is with Aristotle and his definition of the friend as another self that the concept of ethical, and not merely economic, reciprocity is proposed. Now reciprocity or exchange has its foundation in a rationally justified obligation to enhance the virtue of others.

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1 The English reciprocity derives from the French – reciprocite which has the meaning of reciprocal obligation, action, or relation. Here reciprocate refers to a trade relation or policy. cf. Britannica World Language Dictionary, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1958), p. 1053.
2 Greek offers no specific word that translates or parses into English as reciprocity or the Golden Rule. The closest term to reciprocity in Greek is the verb, prodaneizo – to lend before, or first; to advance money for public objects. OGI 46.5. Here the word has a narrow economic meaning. See, Lidell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie, Greek-English Lexicon, (Oxford, 1972), p. 1473. Latin offers better possibilities for our study. Mutuus, a, um has two meanings; the first ethical; the second economic. Ethically it means equal return: mutuum in amicitia [equal return in friendship]; Cicero: pedibus per mutua nexis [fastened on each other]; Vergil: inter se mutual vivunt [by mutual exchange]. Lucretius: abl. as adv. Mutuo; mutuum – mutually, reciprocally. Mutuus, a, um also means - borrowed, lent. Cicero: pecuniare mutuum; and as the substantive it designates a loan. See, A. Walde und J.B. Hoffmann, Lateinisches Etymologisches Woelterbuch, 2er Band (Heidelberg, 1972), p. 140.
3 W.S. Green, “Parsing Reciprocity,” p. 1.
4 Emotivism is a reductionist theory encompassing the doctrine that all evaluative and ethical judgments are reducible to a preference or expression of desire and feeling. Such a theory is initially contextualized by Plotinus through images of grace, light, and love. cf. En., V.5.12.33-35.
5 Aristotle introduces the term another self – allos autos; heteros autos in NE., 1166a1-b29. It appears that this term is based on the proverbial phrase ‘another Heracles.’ cf. Aristotle,EE., 1245a30.
Thus, in reciprocal doing, one enhances one’s own moral excellence and the virtue of the community. Here Aristotle’s claim, that we have obligations to the other as ‘another self,’ reinforces earlier Homeric, Socratic, and Platonic as well as Neoplatonic claims that reciprocity is inclusive of moral, social, and political obligations.  

Protagoras said opposing arguments may be found on every topic. This observation underscores Wattles’ insight that “the Golden Rule has more than a single sense.” Not surprisingly then, the ethics of reciprocity in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman religion and philosophy has more than one sense. Reciprocity is characterized by five main types: honor, virtue, pleasure, duty, and grace. Moreover, if reciprocity is foundational to the Golden Rule, then reciprocal obligations: 1] are essentially ethical and social in their aim and reference; 2] are independent of the desires, aims, and preferences of this or that particular individual; and 3] are autonomous of the desires and feelings of the agent. In brief, reciprocity refers to specific virtues and actions to be taken by a rational agent which are deemed ‘fine’ or ‘admirable’ [kalon, also translated ‘beautiful’]. Moreover, reciprocal actions are taken to benefit others but they are not taken to be necessarily beneficial to either the desires of the agent or others.

The casual reader might suppose that such a variety in understandings of The Golden Rule and its obligations in Greco-Roman religion and philosophy is the result of random historical and cultural shifts which result in manifold definitions of reciprocity. Since this pattern recurs again and again within an extended historical and cultural context, another interpretation suggests itself: that there is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language not only in the Classical, but also in Hellenistic and Roman periods. Such incoherence has a generative consequence. As MacIntyre notes, there are successive reformulations of evaluative language when Plato critiques Homeric and Sophistic reciprocity in the Crito, Laches, Euthyphro, and Republic and Aristotle refines Platonic reciprocity in the Nicomachean Ethics and Eudemian Ethics. This reformulative process continues with the later Platonists who propose reciprocity of grace and charity. Given this the attempt is made in this study to map the evaluative and ethical language of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman understandings of reciprocity. It shall be proposed that such incoherence in evaluative and ethical language suggests not only rupture but reconciliation. Here Hegel’s claim that the dialectical power of negativity holds and endures contradiction is crucial in making sense of the five types of reciprocity that characterize the Golden Rule in Greco-Roman philosophy and religion. The most fundamental and perhaps pervasive theme in this study of reciprocity is what Hegel called the fulfillment of reconciliation.

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6 Only the Epicureans deny political reciprocity.
7 Protagoras, D80 B6a
9 Pleasure in Epicurean sources is non-emotivist. It is the result of a rational pursuit of virtue. cf. Epicurus, Ep. Moen., 131b-132a.
10 I am indebted to A. MacIntyre for this insight. cf. After Virtue (University of Notre Dame Press 1984), p. 130.
[Versoehnung] - where negation and contradiction results in reconciliation. ¹¹ Such negation, contradiction, and reconciliation explain why The Golden Rule has polyvalent meaning in Greco-Roman philosophy and religion.

I

The Golden Rule in Ancient Greece

1

The Sophists and Socrates

The Incoherence of Virtue

If the Golden Rule appears in Socrates and Plato it would approximate: ‘The Good always benefits, it does not harm. Be good unto others.’

Socrates’ and Plato’s accounts of the virtues explain how happiness includes virtuous action as a self-directed and other-directed end in itself, not simply as a means to an end. ¹² Virtuous action rests upon the nature of a human being as a rational agent. Virtuous action also refers to a person’s wisdom, bravery, temperance, justice, or piety. Significantly, all virtues are essentially concerned with the good of others. Here reciprocity emerges. It refers to a person’s virtue as a member of a community. The self-directed and other-directed aspects of virtue are especially clear for Socrates and Plato in their examinations of piety and justice.

The Homeric virtues provided a central part of the ethic of reciprocity in Classical Greek society. In Plato’s aporetic dialogues, Socrates questions his fellow Athenians on the nature of some virtue, piety in the Euthyphro, courage in the Laches, and justice in Republic I. The intent of such questioning is to judge the other of inconsistency. What this suggests is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Athenian culture. It is from the difficulties of relating earlier virtues to contemporary practice that many of the key ethical characteristics of The Golden Rule arise. It is also from the difficulties of relating earlier virtues to contemporary practice that many of the key ethical characteristics of later Greek and Roman understandings of reciprocity arise.

For our purposes, it is useful to contrast what A.W.H. Adkins calls the competitive Homeric virtues and the cooperative virtues extolled in the social world of Athenian democracy. ¹³ It is


also helpful, following MacIntyre, moral disagreement at this level leads to rival conceptions of virtue itself at another. It is when rival conceptions of one and the same virtue coexist that conflict ensues. To illustrate the incoherent state of evaluative language in Athenian culture, we shall examine the Euthrypho. The goal is to sketch out the ethics of reciprocity that emerged in Classical Athens and how this resulted in a novel understanding of The Golden Rule. Reciprocity is based on justice.

The Homeric virtues provided a central part of the ethic of reciprocity in Classical Greek society. In Plato’s aporetic dialogues Socrates questions his fellow Athenians on the nature of some virtue, piety in the Euthrypho, courage in the Laches, and justice in Republic I. The intent of such questioning is to judge the other of inconsistency. What this suggests is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Athenian culture. What follows this is an attempt by Plato in the middle and later dialogues to produce a coherent account of the virtues. Part of Plato’s strategy includes a dismissal of the Homeric understanding of the virtues from the polis.

What is of note here are first Euthrypho’s particularistic understanding of piety and Socrates’ search for a universal definition of the term piety. Socrates speaks of the one Form, presented by all the actions called pious [5d]. Secondly, he claims that the gods love what is pious because it is pious; it is not pious because the gods love it [11e]. The contrast is between Euthrypho’s particular and competitive Homeric understanding of piety and Socrates’ universal and cooperative one. Socrates argues as we apply the word pious to different actions or things, these must have a common characteristic, offer a common appearance or form, to justify the use of the same term. He says: 1] a satisfactory definition will pick out some feature that is the same in every pious action; 2] this feature will not be shared by any impious action; and 3] it will be that feature [or lack of it] that makes an action pious or impious.

Socratic reciprocity is logo-centric; Homer’s is socio-centric. For Homer there are no standards external to those embedded in the structure of community. In Homer evaluative questions were questions of social fact. The foundations of any arete [excellence, virtue] were predetermined by one’s particular place in society. Owing and oughting were determined by kinship and household obligations. Thus morality and social structure were identical. For Socrates the issue is more complex. He claims that a particular understanding of virtue is a necessary but insufficient condition for defining virtue. What Socrates attempts to offer a universal definition of piety, or holiness.

This is a thought beyond the ken of Homer’s Archaic Age. Socrates’ revolutionary insight is the product of the Greek Enlightenment, and it turns as it were “the world upside down.” Homer’s physical particularity of reciprocity – as kinship and household obligations; is challenged by Socrates’ intellectual universality of reciprocity – as rational and political obligations [11e]. Here

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14 A. MacIntyre, op. cit., pp. 131-145.
Socrates makes the novel and radical suggestion that piety and justice are somehow related. Consequently, morality and social structure separate. Significantly, *arete* [excellence, virtue] is no longer singularly connected to *ethos* as habit or custom. Rather *ethos* is a matter of character. Thus to use a Hesiodic metaphor - a *chaos* [gap] emerges and complexity enters. Moral disagreement in the fifth and fourth centuries not only arises because one set of virtues clashes with another. It is because rival conceptions of the same virtue coexist.

Plato asks the Socratic question: What is justice? For Plato, this is asking the question – what is the Form of Justice? Moreover he asks, is the Form of Justice related to the Form of the Good? And if so how? Here Plato reminds us of that passage where Socrates tells Euthrypho that even the gods dispute with each other, not about numbers, weights, and lengths but about the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, good and evil. Moreover, can we know justice is good? Are there ethical objects that rational persons can come to agreement on, or as Herodotus quotes from Pindar - is custom [*nomos*] king of all? Here Plato shifts ground from Socrates’ critique of the Homeric understanding of virtue to a rebuttal of the Sophistic claim that *nomos* rules entirely, that justice is merely a matter of social convention? What this underscores is a continuing incoherence in the use of evaluative language and whether the virtues are competitive or cooperative, particular or universal

2

Plato

The Reciprocity of Virtue

Plato wants to argue that justice is the fundamental reciprocal virtue for a community. He begins by raising the question, is the Form of Justice related to the Form of the Good? If so how? What Plato wants to do is offer a dialectic that illustrates Justice participates in Goodness and that all reasonable people would concur with this. Here our focus shifts to the debate in the *Republic* between Socrates and Thrasymachus on justice.

Adkins has noted there is a resemblance between Thrasymachus and the more venal versions of the Homeric hero. “Scratch Thrasymachus and you find Agamemnon,” a man who only wants victory and its spoils for himself. Everyone and everything is to be used and abused in the pursuit of power. Thus, Socrates’ protagonist is a “Thrasymachus” who argues that the rules of justice are merely conventional and are crafted by those with the power to make them. Moreover, it is not to the advantage of an individual to be just. Rather: “Socrates, injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. And, as I said from the first,

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15 Plato is not the first to propose this redefinition of *ethos*. See, Heraclitus, fr. 119. [D-K]: “Man’s character is his fate.”
16 A. MacIntyre, *op. cit.*., pp. 133-134.
17 Plato, *Euthrypho*, 7d.
justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one’s own profit and advantage.” 19 What Thrasymachus proposes is the inversion of The Golden Rule. Might makes right and being unjust is good judgment. 20 So the Sophist, of whom Plato’s Thrasymachus is the type, makes success the only goal of action and makes the acquisition of power to do and to get whatever one wants the content of success. Furthermore, and this is the dagger at the throat of Plato’s definition of The Golden Rule, there is no such thing as universal justice-as-such, but only a particular justice as understood by the individual when reflecting in his own self-interest.

This relativism, combined with the claim that a virtue is a quality whose only reciprocity is success, threatens to derail Plato’s project altogether. As Parfit notes, Thrasymachus is arguing the Self-Interest Theory of Rationality which argues that a course of action can be rational only if it is in one’s self-interest. 21 The competitive virtues are elevated above the cooperative ones and Plato’s claim that the virtues are not only compatible with each other but the presence of each requires the presence of all is under trial. Reflection on the etymology Justice [dike] may help grasp what Plato is claiming. Dike basically means the order of the universe. The just man [dikaios] is one who respects and does not violate cosmic order. Moreover, Justice requires reference to or belief in a moral order [harmonia] in the universe. If there is moral order or justice in the universe or world soul, then there is moral order in the individual soul and in the state. For Plato, Thrasymachus’ mistake is he uses the word just without any reference to or belief in the moral order of cosmos, soul, and state.

The general state of incoherence of evaluative language escalates as the fifth century BCE comes to a close at Athens. It is possible for Sophists like Thrasymachus to ask if it is or is not justice to do what the established order requires. Here we have moved beyond the Homeric notion held by Euthrypho to be just [dikaios] is not to transgress that social order. Here moral thinking and action about The Golden Rule takes on an increasing ethical rather than social hue as well. The argument of Plato’s Golden Rule is dialectically complex but reciprocally straightforward. Plato’s theory of the reciprocity of cooperative virtue is based on the dual notions of Self-Interest and Mutual Interest Rationality which combines justice in the soul [psuche] to justice within a state [polis]. The dialectic of his argument unfolds in this way: 1] Just actions follow from a soul in harmony; 2] since a harmonious soul is a happy soul; 3] it follows that happiness is a natural good; 4] since this is so, justice is a natural good; 5] which means justice is not good for its consequences but is good in-itself; 6] because justice participates in goodness. At the core of Plato’s view of reciprocity is the virtue justice. Justice radiates out like the spokes of a wheel to kindred virtues such as piety, prudence, courage, and wisdom. The rub is being a good person and being a good citizen is central, but without knowledge of the variety of possible practices of virtue, reciprocity would be impossible. Thus in order for The Golden Rule to work evaluative

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19 Plato, Republic, 344c.
20 Ibid., 348cd.
rationality is necessary. It is also important to view the virtues as cooperative rather than competitive. Otherwise the reciprocity of justice and its kindred virtues would not be possible.

3

Aristotle

The Reciprocal Virtues

If there is a Golden Rule in Aristotle it would approximate: `Love the other as another self.'

Some of Aristotle’s most important passages develop from the aphorism that the friend or loved one is `another' self [allos autos or heteros autos]. He brings in this notion in order to characterize a broad range of attitudes that are typical of what we in this study call The Golden Rule. What they have in common is that they all seem to derive from virtuous attitudes an individual has to him/herself which reciprocally are given to the other.

Aristotle inherits Plato’s belief in the unity and harmony of both the individual soul and the city-state. He also claims that society, the state, or city-state [polis] exists by nature [phusei] not by custom [nomos]. The final cause [telos] of its genesis is to provide the conditions necessary for human existence. Add to this that man is by nature a social animal what results is the society is prior in nature to each of us. Indeed, society is prior to understanding any particular person, it came into being for the sake of living well, and its function is to serve human welfare. Thus, Aristotle views conflict as something to be avoided or managed. The means to this end [telos] is accomplished through the practice of reciprocity and its kindred virtues which include friendship, justice, good wishes and actions, lawfulness, and fairness. He adds to this the argument that one cannot possess any of these virtues of character without possessing all the others.

Reciprocity involves the ability to choose ‘another self’ in acts of friendship, justice, good wishes and actions, lawfulness, and fairness. If one is able to do this then the most cooperative of virtues are set in place rendering conflict nugatory, thereby preserving the state.

The key to understanding Aristotle here is that excellence of character and intelligence cannot be separated and that there is a connection between practical intelligence and the virtues of character. He claims that human beings, like all other species, have a specific nature with certain aims and goals. Thus humans move by nature toward a specific end [telos]. For Aristotle, every activity, inquiry, and practice aims at some good. Thus, he sets himself the task of giving an account of the good one local and particular in society, state, the city-state [polis]; the other universal in the cosmos [kosmos]. What then does the good turn out to be? Aristotle calls it eudaimonia – variously translated as happiness, blessedness, prosperity, and flourishing. Happiness is a kind of existence where the good is a complete human life lived optimally. To

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22 NE.,1166a1-b29. It is clear from the Eudemian Ethics that ‘the friend is another self’ is based on the proverbial phrase ‘another Heracles’, which was presumably said by the hero himself in some story. cf. EE., 1245a30.

23 NE.,1145a.
acquire this state of soul \textit{hexis}, a person has to place the virtues at the center of life. The virtues are the possession of qualities which enable a person to attain happiness. If one lacks these virtues movement toward happiness is thwarted. Why? For Aristotle, the outcome of the exercise of right virtue is a choice which results in right action.

\textbf{Reciprocity, the Self, and Others}

Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship concerned with advantage, pleasure, and goodness. The first two kinds are easy to understand from a purely self-interested point of view. Often we can advance our own interests more efficiently if we can rely on help from others for mutual advantage. We might also take an interest in other people because we enjoy their company. Here our concern depends on what we enjoy, not on any concern for the other person. The third kind of friendship involves concern for the other because of herself and for her own sake, not as a source of advantage or pleasure. Aristotle also argues that this concern for others promotes one’s own good.

He argues that we can see how love of self requires concern for the good of others, once we understand what is meant by self-love and self-interest. What we think is in our self-interest depends on what we think the Self is, and what sorts of desires need to be satisfied in order to achieve its interests. Here Aristotle argues that the self is naturally social, so that something is missing from our good if all our concerns are merely self-interested. \cite{Ibid., 1097a28-b21; Politics, 1252a1-1253a39.} In a concern for other people, we become interested in aims and activities that would otherwise not interest us, and become capable of activities that would otherwise be beyond us. This what Aristotle means when he says that for the virtuous person a friend of the best sort is `another self.’\cite{Ibid., 1170b3-19.} If we are virtuous, we care about the friend in the way we care about ourselves. In doing so we take an interest that we would not otherwise take in what the friend does. Thus, concern for others does not interfere with our interests, but expands them.

The type of friendship which Aristotle has in mind is that which embodies a shared recognition of and pursuit of several goods. It is this sharing which is essential and primary to the constitution of any form of self and community, whether household \textit{oikos} or city \textit{polis}. The social nature of human beings is the basis of justice. Justice is another’s good. \cite{Ibid., 1129b11-1130a5.} In this sense justice is not a separable virtue, but the whole of virtue insofar as it is practiced toward other people. Since virtuous people value the good of other people for the sake of the other people themselves, they also choose virtuous actions for their own sakes. Aristotle describes this attitude to virtuous actions by saying that virtuous people choose them `because they are fine’, or `for the sake of the fine.’ Charles Kahn has taken passages from \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 8 and 9 to develop a theory of Aristotelian altruism. \cite{C. Kahn, art. cit., pp. 20-40.}
with one another is dependent upon the presence in each rational human being of the principle of the active intellect [nous poietikos]. The joint presence of intelligence is the basis of human friendship, that the other person is another self because my true self, and your true self, are identical - which is the nous poietikos shared by a rational community.  

Thus the performance of The Golden Rule is the basis for a happy life [eudaimon] for each human being. Here Aristotle asserts that freedom is a necessary condition for achieving one’s telos. Slaves, unlike free persons, have their tasks less determined for them because they have less an understanding of what they ought to be doing. Free persons as rational agents, however, are more likely to have their activities determined by their concepts of the good life and their commitment to it. Thus, it is appropriate for each of us to maximize the good life.  

Reciprocity as Friendship

Aristotle’s definition of reciprocity is essentially good friendship, and friendship of this type is always reciprocal. Those who are good friends act with the intention of advancing the happiness of one another. This plays out in two ways - as an activity and as a virtue. When he defines it as an activity he does so as one defines a friend:  

Friends must bear good will and good wishes for one another.  

Another example of reciprocity would be the distinction between reciprocity, good will, and friendship:  

To those who wish to be good we ascribe only good will, if the same wishes do not arise from another. For friendship lies in reciprocal good will.  

Thus, even if we wish good will for another, we cannot say we are friends unless the good will is reciprocated. Aristotle also argues that friends must recognize their good wishes for one another.  

These passages convey the sequence of events in the development of reciprocity- affection, good will, and friendship. They also suggest a distinction between essential and accidental friendship based upon the loves exhibited in them. Such loves are distinguished by their objects. Some friends bear good will for others reciprocally, while some friends offer good wishes to others

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29 _Met._, 12.10.1075a20-23.  
30 _Politics_, 1280b39.  
31 _NE_, 1156a3-5.  
32 _Ibid._, 1155b32-34.  
33 _Ibid._, 1155b34-1156a3.  
34 _Ibid._, 1156a6-10.
self-referentially. The first acts for others essentially, advancing the good for others as an end; while second acts accidentally, advancing the good of another as a means to some other end. This is because it is essentially ‘a doing unto others what you would done unto you’ - that is to say, good will and good wishes, reciprocated and recognized, for the sake of the goodness of another, is The Golden Rule.

Perfect friendship is the friendship of good men and of men who are similar according to their virtue. For they wish things that are good similarly to each other as good men they are essentially good.  

Hence, the distinction between good friends and useful and pleasant friends is made. It is only with good friends that one friend loves the other for the sake of the other.

Those who wish the good to their friends for the sake of them are the most friends, for they do this for their sake and not accidentally.

Aristotle further proposes that friendship is a habit [hexis] or activity of the soul, in accordance with a mean, and that it concerns an emotion. But here is careful to make the point that practical wisdom [phronesis] determines this emotional mean. This is why friendship as a habit is virtuous. If friendship were merely based on emotions, it would lack requisite rationality, or rational choice [prohairesis], and thus would not be virtuous. Now since love is a passion and friendship is a habit, it follows that loves divides into two species - a passion and a habit. Of the two, only love that is reciprocal and for the sake of another qualifies as a habit. This is so because friends love what is lovable in each other. Here the quality of being for the sake of another is the crucial one because it relies on rational choice [prohairesis]:

Friends love each other reciprocally from choice and their choice springs from a habit [hexis].

What we have here is Aristotle’s Golden Rule in cameo, in miniature.

**Reciprocity and the Other**

Why does someone enter into a good friendship and acquire virtue? This answer to this question takes us into the center of Aristotle’s theory of reciprocity. The marks of a good friendship begin with a good friendship with oneself. The reason for this is that it is a short step from being a friend to oneself to being a friend for others. Significantly, in being a friend for others one

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39 *Ibid.*, 1155b17-19; 1156a3-5  
acquires, becomes, is another self [*allos autos* or *heteros autos*]. What one comes to acquire as another self are the rational marks of good or excellent friendship, which include the reflective, controlling, discriminating center of his considered attitudes, thoughts, actions, and decisions. It is appropriate to love not only that self in us, but that self in others for it is admirable and wise. It
is reasoned love, not a love driven by vulgar opinion. Such an end is only optimally possible in reciprocity with another, in reciprocity with another self. Thus the desirability of a good person, of a good friend’s existence, and being aware of it through intellectual activity is a virtue. If one lacks good friends one forfeits happiness. This is why we need friends if we are to be happy. The question is what sort of self is it that you love? Here the mother finds her interest in the welfare of her child as a friend, or as the friend as another self. Anyone who is to be happy, then, must have excellent friends.

This sort of concern for others not only promotes one’s own good, but the good of others - as another self.

4

Neoplatonism

Reciprocity Divine

If there is a Golden Rule among Neoplatonists it would read: ‘Do unto others what by God’s grace and love is done unto you.’ Plato and Aristotle have produced their own coherent and well-integrated account of reciprocity and its virtues in an attempt clean up the state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Ancient Greek culture. At the close of Roman antiquity another reading of reciprocity emerges in the Neoplatonists to muddy the waters further. On the basis of distinction made between state and community, a theology develops to support a new understanding of reciprocity. Reciprocity is divine. The source and activity of reciprocity is grounded in divine will, not human reason. What we encounter here is a novel return to the virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle with a `divine twist.’ To understand this return, we need to address changes in sociology of institutions between Classical Greece and Imperial Rome.

The later Platonists make a distinction between a state and society on the one hand and a community on the other. This distinction might appear vapid but bear with me. The political unity of the Roman Empire is clear and precise, and it includes all individuals however unequally. The state also includes institutions, laws, norms, folkways, associations, even folkways. At its widest, a state or society may be taken to include all or any dealing among individuals, whether these are direct or indirect, organized or unorganized, conscious or unconscious, cooperative or antagonistic. This generic use of the term is an organizing abstraction which covers all instances of the adjective ‘social.’ However, society maybe

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42 Ibid., 166a16-17; 1169a2; 1178a2-6.
43 Ibid., 1170a13-b19.
44 Ibid., 1170b3-19.
distinguished from a society. Society in this more precise meaning is a more promising candidate to explain later Platonic understandings of reciprocity.

There is Neoplatonic nostalgia that a city of man would be succeeded by a city of god. To facilitate these ends members of a divine society withdraw from civil society. The real theological question, in Neoplatonic terms, is whether the social order, imposed by the state and expressed in its laws, actually serves our needs. It does not. Thus, it is the aim of neo-Platonists like Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus to make a society into a single, noetic organization.

Plotinus’ theology an understanding of the neo-Platonic conception of a theo-noetic society: a divine community grounded in the virtues of intellectual contemplation. He describes the One as will, and as love, of itself. and divine grace is seen as the product of divine will, or ‘undiminished giving,’ which is the nature of divine activity. Within the Intelligible world will, giving, and order imply one another. Plotinus is cautious when he addresses what is in all intelligible beings and makes them good? He answers it is not sufficient to answer that all humans are intelligible and thus good. It is, however, sufficient and necessary to claim that:

… if they also seek life and everlasting existence and activity what they desire is not intellect insofar as it is intellect, but this is good insofar as it is from the Good and directed to the Good.

The form, order, the goodness of life are given a wider extension than merely intellection, [noesis] by Plotinus. Life in all its diverse forms is not only pre-intellectual in origin but divinely voluntaristic and original. What is novel in Plotinus is a subtle shift from a God, whose activity is purely one of Intellect, to a God who is both Intellect and Will. There is a divine light, both rational and volitional, that the One gives by an act of love and grace to all things. Here Providence permeates the cosmos in varying degrees, as creatures varying in receptivity react to her. This divine giving is a kind of natura medicatrix, where even the evil done by free agents, like the wounds and the broken bones of an organism, may be healed by Providence.

Divine reciprocity, the justice of inevitable retribution [adrasteia], is a principle that operates in the least details of the organic world:

… leaf and bloom and fruit, and still more, men testify to the care of Providence.

Any consideration of virtue in Plotinus requires some discussion of the reciprocity of divine Providence. Providence helps those who live according to divine law. This law provides a

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46 En., VI.8.13.5ff; 15.1.
47 The source of this doctrine is Plato’s account in Timaeus 29e-30a of the divine motive for creation.
49 En., VI. 20.22-24.
50 Ibid., VI.7.35-30-34.
51 Ibid., II.2.5.
52 Ibid., II.2.13-14.
53 Ibid., III.2.8.
good life, here and hereafter, and for the bad there is the reverse. This is where divine grace comes into play.

Iamblichus and Proclus argue that both exist under an appropriate mode on successive levels of reality. However, union between the divine and human only occurs through appropriate ritual actions. The rituals that invoke the gods are a voluntary bestowal of divine power. The human soul blessed by such power gains salvation. This claim resulted in the claims by Iamblichus and his heirs that theurgy, not philosophy, leads to divine union. Hence, there is an emphasis in later Neoplatonism of the need for divine grace, combined with a new human receptiveness toward such grace. Without grace the salvation of the soul is impossible. Here, we encounter for the first time the notion of a divine, non-reflective, selfless reciprocity, a giving is a form of charity.

The Reciprocity and Patronage of the Sage

Platonists of the Roman period concentrated their attention on a portrait of reciprocity as it might be, represented by the ideal of the sapiens or sage. The anonymity and loneliness of life in the great new cities, where one was a cipher reinforced the need for a community of divine friends and helpers. These foci replaced the inherited local community of the old closed society. They also formed the basis for a new notion of reciprocity in late antiquity friendship [philia] is complemented by the cooperative virtue par excellence - philanthropy [philanthropia]. In this context, reciprocity and friendship take on the aura of a divine unity [henosis] rather than a human constellation of kinship, familial, and civic obligations. Central to this notion of friendship as divine unity, is the concept of a detachable theurgic self. Once activated the soul escapes this world of darkness and penance to arrive in another realm of light and salvation where the soul becomes one with the divine.

In quest of divine unity, Neoplatonists became increasingly preoccupied with the techniques of individual salvation through holy books, prophetic inspiration, and revelation; or by oracles, dreams, and waking visions. Others found salvation in ritual by initiation in esoteric musteria. Here we encounter the starting-point for a new and entirely different kind of philosophia and religio. In the words of Justin Martyr:

The aim of Platonism is to see God face to face.

Welcome the world of the philosopher-theurgist. Deities, daemons, and the sage as patrons bestow a reciprocity of grace and charity upon their clients.

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54 Proclus, *PT*, 1.19, p. 91.16-21.
55 Iamblichus, *De Myst.*, 1.12; 1.14; 3.16-18.
56 *ibid.*, 2.11.
By the mid-fourth century CE the Platonic philosopher and theurgist are indistinguishable. As the knower of divine wisdom and the doer of the hieratic arts, this figure becomes a supernatural extension of divine power (dunamis) and love (eros) in the universe. Thriving on the tenacious bond of divine friendship (philia) their knowledge and activity offered a mantel of divine patronage (prostateia) and the possibility of divine salvation (sotereia) to all who fell within their orbit. Indeed, the philosophers use and transfer of divine power to their clients rendered accessible the proprietary relationship with the gods thought lost because of the fall of the soul. A divinely grounded reciprocity of love and grace permeates this Neoplatonic understanding of The Golden Rule. Reciprocity was not directed to members of society in general but to members of a specific religious-philosophical community, an ecclesia Neoplatonica or Neoplatonic church.

Porphyry and Iamblichus nicely illustrates the shifts occurring. Interested in the habits of the Egyptian priesthood, he noted how it had created a caste apart. Quoting Chaeremon, its members lived in highly regulated communities and chastised the impiety of those who traveled outside of Egypt, because they exposed themselves to alien ways. Nonetheless, these priests were also dedicated to philosophy and theology. As such, this group becomes a model for Porphyry of a Neoplatonic community, a pagan “church” of the saved who would receive the grace, light, and love of the gods.

It was under an Egyptian priestly pseudonym, Abammon that Iamblichus of Apamea penned a kind of summa theologica wherein he sketches what reciprocal relations between divinity and humanity looked like. He sees the divine and human worlds as a coherent, inter-linked hierarchy. Divine reciprocity manifests itself through theology, theurgy combined with traditional cult practices such as sacrifice, divination, and oracles. Here the theurgist alone is the master all of sacred science from healing and rainmaking to conjuring visions of the creator god. Moreover, because this figure alone receives divine knowledge and praxis of by the grace of the gods, he alone administers it to an elite religious community endowing it with piety and sacredness. The theurgist becomes a medium (docheus) for the presence of the divine in the world and the practice of The Golden Rule.

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60 For a study on this phenomenon see, E.V. Gallagher, Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus, (Scholars Press,1982).
61 Porphyry, de Abst., 4.6-8.
63 Iamblichus, Abamonis resp., 4.2.184; 5.22.
64 Ibid., 5.15.219-220; 20. 228.
65 There are a variety of terms in Greek and Latin sources that suggest Neoplatonic religious self-definition: threkrasia, eusebeia, nomos, hieros, hosios and hagios; religio, pietas, sacer, and sanctus. cf. G. Fowden, art. cit., p. 83.
66 Psellus, 1.249 K-D.
This map of divine love and power correlates with another symbolized by divine presence. A divine light (autophia) often appeared with the manifestation (autophania) of the deity. Sometimes the philosopher-theurgist, would radiate divine light. While lecturing Proclus would project such light for he communicated with luminous apparitions of Hecate and saw the goddess herself. Not only gods appear, a parousia of nature also appears, preceded by a whole choir of daemons, angels, and spirits. All are gracious, kind, and give beneficence to the person who evoked them as well to those whom the theurgist initiates into their mysteries.

Sometimes through symbols and tokens the god would recognize the theurgist as a legitimate practitioner, and the theurgist the god as a real god. Spoken or unspeakable, concealed within the statues of the gods, symbols assure the presence and intervention of the gods known only to the telestial. Here a sacred fire that shines without shape speaks to the theurgist:

> For your sake, bodies have been attached to our autophanies (autoptois phasmasin).

Eunapius reports that Maximus assembled a large number of friends in the temple of Hecate and burned a grain of incense, reciting to himself the text of a hymn. The goddesses smiled, then laughed, and finally the torches she held burst into flames, into a blaze of light. Wise men and women, therefore, brought a divine presence into the world and the divine power embraced their human community, reintegrating each human soul with her divine source.

Later Platonic hagiographers such as Philostratus, Damascius, Marinus, Eunapius, Sozomen, and Zosimus present the lives of wise men and women who effectively brokered this reciprocal relationship. We are told that Asclepiodorus and Heraiscus spent long periods of their lives in temples while Damascius resided in a cave under a temple devoted to Cybele near Hierapolis. Each communed with the gods and goddesses who appeared at such places. Venturing forth they became privileged agents and administrators of divine power, love, patronage, and salvation to a wider Roman world. Two women philosophers, Hypatia of Alexandria and Sosipatra of Pergamon were higher souls protected and guided by blessed daemons and heroes. Using a statue Hypatia telestically cured a man who fell in love with her while Sosipatra victim of a love-spell cast on her by Philometer had it reversed by Maximus, the pupil of Aedesius and teacher of the Emperor Julian. Other women like Asclepigenia and Anthusa of Cilicia joined men like

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67 *Oracles*, fr. 286 (des Places).
68 Iamblichus, *De Myst.*, 2.4. cf. 1.12; 2.5; 3.6.
69 Ibid., 2.4.7; *Oracles*, frs. 88; 175. (des Places).
70 *Oracles*, fr. 149 (des Places).
71 Proclus, *In Tim.*, 1.273d.
72 *Oracles*, frs. 148; 173 (des Places).
73 Ibid., fr. 101 (des Places); cf. Iamblichus, *De Myst.*, 5.23.
74 *Vit. Soph*, 475 (Boiss).
75 Zosimus, *Epis.*, 5.46.3ff.
77 Ibid.
Plutarch and Hermias to contact, fathom, and translate the divine presence and hallowing in statues to aristocratic clients in city, town, and country throughout the Empire.\textsuperscript{78}

In nuce, late Roman women and men were convinced that gods, goddesses, daemons, and angels revealed their natures and names through those special men and women whose primordial sowing linked them eternally with the divine. A theurgic reciprocity enabled the imagination to project a structure of a clearly defined reality onto a known social world and to define personal relationships. Thus, the divine has its network; holy men and women tapped into it by building patronage networks of their own. As a result the theurgist was placed at the forefront of later Roman society as the fulcrum of a wide-ranging social \textit{patrocinium}. As patrons divine men and women emerged to resolve the gulf between self and deity through a reciprocal therapy of proximity. The theurgist emerges as the leader of a \textit{patrona communis} who sees the different levels of the self and the manifold levels between the self and god and resolves them. Thus, for ancient Mediterranean men and women the pilgrimage of the soul to intellect and to deity is cast in terms of divine giving. What accelerates at the close of antiquity is the practice of the theological virtues of reciprocity or The Golden Rule.

\textsuperscript{78} A portrait of this mood is nicely sketched by Augustine, \textit{Civ, dei}, 5.23.235.28ff.
THE GOLDEN RULE IN GRECO-ROMAN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY [1]

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Introduction

These chapters have as their purpose a general definition of reciprocity and the Golden Rule in Greco-Roman religion and philosophy. Addressing this question should involve a comprehensive survey of the evidence for the Golden Rule in the Greco-Roman period. What I attempt here is much more modest. The goal of this inquiry is first to throw some light on the archaic and classical origins of The Golden rule; secondly to offer examples illustrating its practice; and thirdly, to map the emergence of an ethics of reciprocity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Initially, focus is upon the reciprocal virtues as they appear in the Homeric poems and selected Platonic dialogues. This is followed by a study of reciprocity in Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoa, and the later Pythagoreans and Platonists. The study concludes with a consideration of the differences between ancient and modern theories of the Golden Rule.

Two problems immediately face us. The first is that there are no words in Greek and Latin that translate into English as reciprocity. Moreover the earliest Greek and Latin terms used for ‘reciprocity’ arise out of a notion of economic exchange. Only later does there emerge in Latin the notion of ethical exchange as reciprocity. The second is that the general definition of the Golden Rule offered by Professor Green “that instructs us to treat others as we want, and would want, others to treat us,” is lacking in Archaic, Classical, and Greco-Roman sources. Indeed, an emotivist theory of reciprocity does not exist in Greco-Roman writings until late Pagan Antiquity.

1 The English reciprocity derives from the French – reciprocite which has the meaning of reciprocal obligation, action, or relation. Here reciprocite refers to a trade relation or policy. cf. Britannica World Language Dictionary, (Encyclopedia Brittanica, 1958), p. 1053.
2 Greek offers no specific word that translates or parses into English as reciprocity or the Golden Rule. The closest term to reciprocity in Greek is the verb, prodaneizo – to lend before, or first; to advance money for public objects. OGI 46.5. Here the word has a narrow economic meaning. See, Lidell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie, Greek-English Lexicon, (Oxford, 1972), p. 1473. Latin offers better possibilities for our study. Mutuus, a, um has two meanings; the first ethical; the second economic. Ethically it means equal return: mutuum in amicitia [equal return in friendship]; Cicero: pedibus per mutua nexis [fastened on each other]; Vergil: inter se mutual vivunt [by mutual exchange]. Lucretius: abl. as adv. Mutuo; mutuum – mutually, reciprocally. Mutuus, a, um also means - borrowed, lent. Cicero: pecuniam dare mutuam; and as the substantive it designates a loan. See, A. Walde und J.B. Hormann, Lateinisches Etymologisches Woeterbuch, 2er Band (Heidelberg, 1972), p. 140.
3 W.S. Green, “Parsing Reciprocity,” p. 1.
and here only implicitly. 4 We return to this “problematic” at the close of the chapter on The Golden Rule: The Greco-Roman world.

However, out of such etymological and definitional incoherence, clarity eventually emerges. It is with Aristotle and his definition of the friend as another self that the concept of ethical, and not merely economic, reciprocity is proposed. 5 Now reciprocity or exchange has its foundation in a rationally justified obligation to enhance the virtue of others. Thus, in reciprocal doing, one enhances one’s own moral excellence and the virtue of the community. Here Aristotle’s claim, that we have obligations to the other as ‘another self,’ reinforces earlier Homeric, Socratic, and Platonic as well as later Epicurean, Stoic, Neoplatonic claims that reciprocity is inclusive of moral, social, and political obligations. 6

Protagoras said opposing arguments may be found on every topic. 7 This observation underscores Wattles’ insight that “the Golden Rule has more than a single sense.” 8 Not surprisingly then, the ethics of reciprocity in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman religion and philosophy has more than one sense. Reciprocity is characterized by five main types: honor, virtue, pleasure, duty, and grace. 9 Moreover, if reciprocity is foundational to the Golden Rule, then reciprocal obligations: 1] are essentially ethical and social in their aim and reference; 2] are independent of the desires, aims, and preferences of this or that particular individual; and 3] are autonomous of the desires and feelings of the agent. In brief, reciprocity refers to specific virtues and actions to be taken by a rational agent which are deemed ‘fine’ or ‘admirable’ [kalon, also translated ‘beautiful’]. Moreover, reciprocal actions are taken to benefit others but they are not taken to be necessarily beneficial to either the desires of the agent or others.

The casual reader might suppose that such a variety in understandings of The Golden Rule and its obligations in Greco-Roman religion and philosophy is the result of random historical and cultural shifts which result in manifold definitions of reciprocity. Since this pattern recurs again and again within an extended historical and cultural context, another interpretation suggests itself: that there is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language not only in the Classical, but also in Hellenistic and Roman periods. 10 Such incoherence has a generative consequence. As MacIntyre notes, there are successive reformulations of evaluative language when Plato critiques Homeric and Sophistic reciprocity in the Crito, Laches, Euthyphro, and Republic and Aristotle refines Platonic reciprocity in the Nicomachean Ethics and Eudemian

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4 Emotivism is a reductionist theory encompassing the doctrine that all evaluative and ethical judgements are reducible to a preference or expression of desire and feeling. Such a theory is initially contextualized by Plotinus through images of grace, light, and love. cf. En., V.5.12.33-35.
5 Aristotle introduces the term another self – allos autos; heteros autos in NE., 1166a1-b29. It appears that this term is based on the proverbial phrase ‘another Heracles.’ cf. Aristotle, EE., 1245a30.
6 Only the Epicureans deny political reciprocity.
7 Protagoras, D80 B6a
9 Pleasure in Epicurean sources is non-emotivist. It is the result of a rational pursuit of virtue. cf. Epicurus, Ep. Moen., 131b-132a.
10 I am indebted to A. MacIntyre for this insight. cf. After Virtue (University of Notre Dame Press 1984), p. 130.
Ethics. It is suggested that this reformulative process continues with the Epicureans, who offer their reciprocity of pleasure, the Stoics who present their reciprocity of duty, and later Pythagoreans and Platonists who propose their reciprocity of grace and charity.

Given this the attempt is made in this study to map the evaluative and ethical language of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman understandings of reciprocity. It shall be proposed that such incoherence in evaluative and ethical language suggests not only rupture but reconciliation. Here Hegel’s claim that the dialectical power of negativity holds and endures contradiction is crucial in making sense of the five types of reciprocity that characterize the Golden Rule in Greco-Roman philosophy and religion. The most fundamental and perhaps pervasive theme in this study of reciprocity is what Hegel called the fulfillment of reconciliation [Versoehnung] - where negation and contradiction results in reconciliation. ¹¹

From the beginning of Greek antiquity with its poets and philosophers, to the close of Roman antiquity, with its philosophers and theologians, we witness a move beyond external ruptures to shared internal understandings of reciprocity as a virtue or excellence based on reason. Encounters between the Sophists, Socrates and Homer; Aristotle and Plato; and Epicurean, Stoic, and Neoplatonic philosophers, result in a “sublation” that culminates in a reconciliation of Greco-Roman evaluative and ethical language at the close of pagan antiquity. Such negation, contradiction, and reconciliation, also explains why The Golden Rule has polyvalent meaning in Greco-Roman philosophy and religion.

I

The Golden Rule: Ancient Greece

I

Homer

Reciprocity, Excellence, and Honor

If the Golden Rule appears in Homer it would approximate: ‘Honor the other as they ought to honor you.’

Initially in those cultures, where moral thinking and action is structured according to some version of the Golden Rule, the chief means of moral education was the telling of stories. This was the case in Greek culture which possessed a stock of stories which derive from and tell about its heroic age. The Iliad and Odyssey provided the historical memory and a moral background to debates in the Classical period on a past moral order, whose values remained influential, but were now under siege by Sophists and Socrates alike.

Since an understanding of the Homeric virtues is a necessary condition for a comprehension of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman virtues a consideration of the Golden Rule in the Homeric, Classical, and Greco-Roman traditions must begin with reciprocity. When reciprocity is mentioned at all in Homer, it is generally in connection with the word arete, which translates as any excellence, and later as virtue. Reciprocity was a social duty for the Greeks of the Archaic Age. The Golden Rule as reciprocity covers every type of attachment encompassing owing and ought from kinship relations to societal relationships within the polis. The conventional associations of reciprocity are with excellences or virtues such as friendship, glory, courage, cunning, strength, and prosperity. All these features should be kept in mind when reflecting on the meaning of `reciprocity’ in the Homeric Age. They also assist in explaining Professor Green’s four basic and fairly broad topics: what does the Golden Rule say; what does the Golden Rule mean; how does the Golden Rule work; and how does the Golden matter?

The key features of the virtues in Homeric society were predetermined as were one’s place in society. Moreover, an individual’s place in society determined one’s privileges and duties. Every individual has a role and status within a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. Here the key structures grounded upon those of kinship and the household. In such a society a man knows who he is by knowing his role in these structures. In knowing this he also knows what he owes and what is owed to him by the occupant of every other role and status in society. The Archaic Greek [dein] illustrates such reciprocity nicely. There is no clear distinction between `ought’ and `owe.’ There follows from this a clear understanding by an individual of what actions he is required to perform and what actions fall short of what is required. In this ethic of reciprocity what are required are actions. Man and his actions are identical. An individual in Homeric society is what he does.

Homeric reciprocity begins with the virtues [aretai]. Arête, excellence, and kudos, glory, are central virtues which illustrate Homeric reciprocity A fast runner displays the excellence of his feet and a son excels his father in every kind of excellence – as athlete, soldier, and in mind. Glory belongs to the individual who excels in battle or sport. What appears odd to modern sensibilities is the close connection between reciprocity, excellence, and glory. Excellence is important, not merely as a quality of individuals, but as the quality necessary to sustain a household and a community. Glory is central because the part it plays in sustaining public recognition of kinship structures. One displays excellence of mind or glory in battle to maintain and sustain self, family, and community.

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13 For an excellent study on this topic, see, W.C. Greene, Moira, (Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 10-46.
14 Iliad, 20.411; 15.642.
Arete is connected to ethos in Homeric society. The etymology of ethos denotes custom, usage, manner, habit. In Homer it refers to the custom, usage, manner, and habit of human character. In Homer ethics and social structure are one and the same. What is alien to our conception of virtue is the intimate connection in archaic society between the concept of reciprocity and its allied virtues, and the concepts of friendship, courage, fate, and death. To be courageous is to be someone on whom reliance can be placed. Thus, courage is an important ingredient in practicing the Golden Rule. The bonds of courage are modeled on those of kinship. Hence, who my friends are is defined by who my kinsmen are. The other ingredient of reciprocity is fidelity. A friend’s courage assures his will and power to aid me and my household. This is important because my household’s fidelity is the basic guarantee of social unity. Hence, Andromache and Hector, Penelope and Odysseus are reciprocal friends as much as Achilles and Patroclus.

What needs to be understood is that any adequate account of The Golden Rule in Archaic Greece would be impossible without considering its social context. Morality and social structure are identical. Evaluative questions are questions of social fact. Moreover, the given customs which assign men and women their place in the social order and with it their identity also prescribes what they owe and what is owed to them. Furthermore, social habits also dictate how men and women are to be treated and regarded if they fail custom and they are to treat and regard others if they fail.

This suggests that ethics as something distinct from kinship does not yet exist. Indeed, the rules of kinship constitute patterns of a Golden Rule of an ineluctable kind. There is a contrast between the man who not only possesses courage and its allied virtues, but who also has kinsman and friends, who possesses such virtues, and the man lacking all these on the other. However, death waits for both alike. Thus, an honorable life is the ultimate standard of value. If someone kills my friend, I assume the right of their death. The more extended my system of kinsmen and friends, the more liabilities I incur, which might also end in my death. Thus, the man or woman who does what he or she ‘owes’ and ‘oughts’ moves steadily forward in virtue. It is honor and not shame that matters. To comprehend this is a virtue as well. Indeed, it is the necessary part of courage to understand that human life has a determinate form with reciprocity at its core. In the end, neither willing nor cunning will enable one to evade reciprocity. The Golden Rule is a reciprocal reality.

Identity in Homeric society involves particularity, accountability, and reciprocity. Given my social place, I am responsible for owing, doing or not doing to others. It is to, for, and with specific individuals that I must do what I owe, and it is to these members of my community that I am accountable. Thus, the men and women in epic poetry do not find it difficult to know what they owe one another. They feel aidos – a proper sense of shame – when confronted with misbehavior. If not, others will remind them of the honor they owe society. Shame [aidos] acts
negatively and forbids humans to do certain things especially with the aged, the weak, the socially unfortunate, whose rights are guarded by the gods.

Thus aged Priam and the swine-herder Eumaeus both invoke shame. If shame is the sense of honor on its negative side, its positive character is expressed by thumos, the proud courageous, high spirited self, eager to assert itself and win glory [kudos]. But this spirit, “very manly” [agnenor] and self-seeking, may also pass over into hybris – arrogance, wanton violence, and insolence. This is the fault of Ajax who boasted he escaped death despite the gods and then incurred death through the vengeful wrath of Poseiden. In varying degrees, hybris is the transgression of the suitors of Penelope, of Achilles when he desecrates the body of Hector – casting away all pity and shame.

Although forbidden shameful deeds are committed. This brings with it the reciprocity of just indignation [nemesis]. Thus Hector dissuaded from battle by Andromache, cannot give in to his wife’s appeals:

For I have sore shame [aidos] of the Trojans and Trojan women
With trailing robes, if like a coward I shrink from battle; moreover
My own spirit [thumos] forbids me.

Central to honorable reciprocity is self-respect and public opinion. Penelope has respect for her lord’s bed and the talk of the people. Telemachus appeals to the suitors to resent, feel nemesis, for his intolerable plight and to have regard for their neighbors. Moreover, they should fear the gods. He calls out to them in the name of Zeus and Themis. Telemachus fears for himself. If he obeys the suitors he shall be punished by the gods, the Erinyes, and the blame [nemesis] of men. The suitors, however, “had no fear of the gods or of the indignation of men hereafter.”

Without the place of reciprocity in the social order humans would be incapable of receiving recognition from others, human and divine. Indeed, not only would others not know who someone is, but an individual would not know who he is. Here it is important to remember that the Greek word for alien and guest are the same. A stranger has to be received with hospitality, a reciprocity limited but well-defined. When Odysseus encounters the Cyclopes the question is whether they possess themis, or customary law shared by all civilized peoples. The answer to this question is discovered by how they treat strangers. Since the Cyclopes eat strangers they have no themis, and have no recognized human identity as strangers. As such, those without customary law fall outside of the obligations of the Golden Rule.

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16 Odyssey, 24.503-506; 56-58; 83.  
17 Ibid, 4.499-511.  
18 Iliad, 24.39-45.  
19 Ibid., 6.441-444.  
21 Ibid., 2.64-68.  
22 Ibid., 2.134-137.  
23 Ibid., 22.39ff.
In *Aidos* and *Nemesis* the Homeric world felt two forms of *Themis*. The first is self-regarding, the other social with both constraining men and women to observe reciprocal limits. If humans feel nemesis at overly shameful acts, the gods do as well. In the *Iliad* each satisfaction of passion or pride is paid for by sorrow or death. In the *Odyssey* virtue and vice receive their rewards. In nuce, honor and shame is the fulcrum upon which The Golden Rule turns and honor and shame is conferred by the gods and one’s peers. Without honor a man or woman is without value. Hence, the evaluative thoughts and actions employed by an Achilles or an Odysseus are mutually inter-defined within the context of an honor and shame culture. Each is explained in terms of the other.

**Summary**

The exercise of The Golden Rule in Homeric society required a particular kind of human being and a specific kind of social structure. What reciprocity is as virtue [*arête*] and what it is not, shall be delineated through Green’s four topics:

I. What does The Golden Rule say? In Archaic Greek culture and religion reciprocity is formulated positively and negatively in terms of what an individual owes society and what society owes the individual. In Homer, to follow the custom of reciprocity results in honor while to ignore it results in shame. Here Achilles is often the template. His friendship with Patroclus and the actions taken by Achilles after his death against Hector, illustrate the incoherence of Homeric notions of reciprocity. Epic and saga articulates reciprocity’s form in both individual and social life. Since The Golden Rule could not be adequately understood apart from story-telling, poetry was chosen as the medium of discourse. It also should be remembered that in eighth century BCE Hellas, no other genre of literature was available. The Golden Rule is not specifically mentioned or formulated. The closest approximation is: ‘honor others as they ought to owe honor to you.’

II. What does The Golden Rule mean?

A. Literature. The Golden Rule’s literary context is epic poetry. Within this setting, The Golden Rule is provoked by the form of a certain kind of story-telling where character can only be explained in a succession of incidents which exemplify Agamemnon’s, Achilles, Patroclus,’ or Hector’s honorable [and shameful] actions. All questions of reciprocity arise within this literary-social framework. It is important to note that, the social framework within which reciprocity works cannot be chosen. However, literary context generally does not constrain The Golden Rule’s meaning. Rather it enhances it. Epic is the stage upon which The Golden Rule unfolds for identity in Homeric society is often defined by reciprocity. Thus the characters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* observe the rules that they observe and honor the precepts which they honor because without them they would not be able to define themselves. Glossing or embedding The Golden Rule in a particular setting or circumstance is a favorite literary device of Homer’s. Reflect on
the virtues of reciprocity as practiced by Penelope on suitors and Odysseus alike at the end of the *Odyssey*.

B. Interpretation. The Golden Rule plays a limited but important role in the Homeric interpretive tradition. While we cannot as of yet answer how The Golden Rule will be interpreted and applied over time, it can be noted that reciprocity is something rightfully owed another. Thus there is much in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that distinguishes between excessive or ridiculous inferences from The Golden Rule. One should avoid both excess and deficiency if heroic virtues are to be upheld. The Golden Rule is a mean between extremes.

III. How does The Golden Rule work?

A. Social Consequence. The Golden Rule is directed to the members of Archaic Greek nobility. It applies uniformly across all noble gender and social classes. Thus, an honorable reciprocity must be observed at all times. Thus reciprocity is limited to a particular group; it does not apply to people in general, save for all are owed hospitality. But even this *arête* is limited and well-defined. The Golden Rule does not presuppose literacy but it does require knowledge of the social obligations within kinship groups.

B. Actor and Recipient. The assumed actor and recipient of The Golden Rule are members of Archaic Greek nobility. The Golden rule does not assume the actor is an autonomous moral agent as much as it assumes a collective social agency. There is a sharp contrast between the Homeric socially conscious self and the subjective, emotivist self of modernity. Individual desires may motivate both types but the social constraint of honor and shame defines the heroic self. The self of the Archaic Age also lacks precisely that characteristic central to selfhood in Classical Athens: the capacity to detach oneself from any particular standpoint, to step backwards, and view or judge that standpoint from the outside. In Homeric society there is no outside except that of the stranger. Anyone who tried to withdraw from his or her given position in society would disappear. Consequently, both actor and recipient are prescribed by society and kinship traditions supply the content for reciprocity. The Golden Rule applies to human kinship and societal groups. The Homeric deities have their own code of reciprocity.

C. Reflexivity and Reciprocity. The Golden Rule in Homeric society implicitly includes reflexivity as a component of reciprocity. However, reflexivity is little practiced by the Homeric hero. How Agamemnon treated Achilles, and Achilles violates Hector are witness. Thus there is little to suggest that The Golden Rule is based on the precept ‘love your neighbors as yourself.’ Rather than love, reciprocity is based on the obligations of an owed kinship or friendship. Here The Golden Rule’s reference point is both the actor and recipient of the action with little to suggest that it presupposes or requires empathy. Only the social norms implicit in Archaic Greek society would limit reciprocity.

D. Violence and Oppression. What we have to learn from Homeric society is twofold: first that all morality is tied to the socially local and particular; and secondly that there is no way to
possess the virtues of reciprocity except as a part of a kinship tradition in which we inherit and practice virtue. The Golden Rule sanctions violence and oppression: `do unto others as they do unto you' allows for violent and oppressive reciprocity. However social circumstances make such actions acceptable they are only allowed within well-defined honor-shame limits.

IV. How does The Golden Rule matter?

A. Systemic Significance.

The Golden Rule is a component in the cultural system of Archaic Greece. Reciprocity works within the context of Homeric society and religion, with its concomitant myths, beliefs, and rituals to produce a coherent vision of what a society is `owed' or `ought' to be. What must be assumed for The Golden Rule to work in this society is the knowledge that evaluative questions are questions of social fact. This is why Homer always speaks of practical knowledge, of what to do and how to judge. It is in this sense that many social teachings and practices in Homeric society depend on knowing how to honorably practice The Golden Rule. In this sense, the principal virtues are honor and shame rule. These evaluative precepts and values complement reciprocity rather than supersede it. They offer a grid within which The Golden Rule is known and practiced. In this context, reciprocity is practiced as a contest [agon] of social owing and oughting. Indeed, it is the contest for acquiring honor and avoiding shame that gives The Golden Rule coherence. For Homeric men and women there could be no standard external to those embodied in the honor and shame structures of their own community to which appeal could be made. In the Homeric world the question of reciprocity is a judgment of what is honorably due to a king or queen. In this sense there are no other precepts or values that supersede The Golden Rule. The only challenges to it are acts of hubris which run contrary to what is reciprocally owed to the other.

B. Consequences of Failure and Success.

The Golden Rule assign men and women their place in the social order, and with it their identity, prescribe what they owe and what is owed them. Moreover, such rules tell how men and women are to be treated if they fail and how they are to treat and regard others, if those others fail. The consequence of ignoring, disobeying, or failing to implement The Golden Rule is dishonor which leads to kinship dissolution and social chaos. Thus there are negative social sanctions and divine judgements on those who abjure honor to others. Reciprocity is owed to all within this society. If practiced, honorable social rewards and benefits follow.

C. Exceptions.
There are no exceptions to following the principle of reciprocity unless those dealt with do not possess themis, the Homeric concept of customary law shared by all civilized peoples. This exception reveals that it is permissible to treat others as you do not want them to treat you. It also tells us that the foundation of Homeric reciprocity rests on the social imperative that the honorable man or woman has an obligation to maintain kinship cohesion and to avoid social chaos.

II

The Golden Rule: Classical Athens

The Sophists, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

1

The Sophists and Socrates

The Incoherence of Virtue

If the Golden Rule appears in Socrates and Plato it would approximate: ‘The Good always benefits, it does not harm. Be good unto others.’

Socrates’ and Plato’s accounts of the virtues explain how happiness includes virtuous action as a self-directed and other-directed end in itself, not simply as a means to an end. Virtuous action rests upon the nature of a human being as a rational agent. Virtuous action also refers to a person’s wisdom, bravery, temperance, justice, or piety. Significantly, all virtues are essentially concerned with the good of others. Here reciprocity emerges. It refers to a person’s virtue as a member of a community. The self-directed and other-directed aspects of virtue are especially clear for Socrates and Plato in their examinations of piety and justice. To show that both self-directed and other-directed virtue is elements of happiness, it is necessary to turn to the Euthrypho and Republic.

It is from the difficulties of relating earlier virtues to contemporary practice that many of the key ethical characteristics of Greek and Greco-Roman societies arise. The Homeric virtues provided a central part of the ethic of reciprocity in Classical Greek society. In Plato’s aporetic dialogues, Socrates questions his fellow Athenians on the nature of some virtue, piety in the Euthrypho, courage in the Laches, and justice in Republic I. The intent of such questioning is to judge the other of inconsistency. What this suggests is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Athenian culture. What follows this is an attempt by Plato in the middle

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and later dialogues to produce a coherent account of the virtues. Part of Plato’s strategy includes a dismissal of the Homeric understanding of the virtues from the polis.

It is from the difficulties of relating earlier virtues to contemporary practice that many of the key ethical characteristics of later societies arise. The Homeric virtues provided a central part of the ethic of reciprocity in Classical Greek society. In Plato’s aporetic dialogues Socrates questions his fellow Athenians on the nature of some virtue, piety in the Euthrypho, courage in the Laches, and justice in Republic I. The intent of such questioning is to judge the other of inconsistency. What this suggests is a general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Athenian culture. What follows this is an attempt by Plato in the middle and later dialogues to produce a coherent account of the virtues. Part of Plato’s strategy includes a dismissal of the Homeric understanding of the virtues from the polis.

For our purposes, it is useful to contrast what A.W.H. Adkins calls the competitive Homeric virtues and the cooperative virtues extolled in the social world of Athenian democracy. It is also helpful, following MacIntyre, moral disagreement at this level leads to rival conceptions of virtue itself at another. It is when rival conceptions of one and the same virtue coexist that conflict ensues. To illustrate the incoherent state of evaluative language in Athenian culture, we shall examine the Euthrypho. To show how Plato hammers out a coherent account of the virtues, selections from the Republic are studied. The goal is to sketch out the ethics of reciprocity that emerged in Classical Athens and how this resulted in a novel understanding of The Golden Rule. Reciprocity is based on justice.

The word piety, holy, godly [eusebeia] appears in Sophocles’ reflections on epic legend. Sophocles illustrates piety as among the highest of virtues and notes that its violation leads to suffering. Here it is appropriate that we reflect on its meaning in Socrates. Euthrypho represents the Homeric perspective on the virtues while Socrates offers a “contemporary” one. Socrates and Euthrypho are in conflict over the same virtue, piety [eusebeia]. The Euthrypho signals the incoherent state of evaluative language in fifth century Athens. The dialogue illustrates disagreement over whether piety is a competitive or a cooperative virtue and whether or not a virtue is particular or universal in nature. The dialogue opens with Socrates questioning Euthrypho’s business at court and is told that he is prosecuting his own father for the murder of a laborer who is himself a murderer. Euthrypho’s family and friends believe his actions impious but he thinks them mistaken. This leads Socrates to ask, what is piety? And the rest of the dialogue is devoted to a definition of piety.

What is of note here are first Euthrypho’s particularistic understanding of piety and Socrates’ search for a universal definition of the term. Socrates speaks of the one Form, presented by all the actions called pious [5d]. Secondly, he claims that the gods love what is pious because it is

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26 A. MacIntyre, op. cit., pp. 131-145.
27 Sophocles, Antigone, 1347-1353.
pious; it is not pious because the gods love it [11e]. The contrast is between Euthrypho’s particular and competitive Homeric understanding of piety and Socrates’ universal and cooperative one. Socrates argues as we apply the word pious to different actions or things, these must have a common characteristic, offer a common appearance or form, to justify the use of the same term. He says: 1] a satisfactory definition will pick out some feature that is the same in every pious action; 2] this feature will not be shared by any impious action; and 3] it will be that feature [or lack of it] that makes an action pious or impious.

Socratic particularity is different than Homeric particularity. Socratic reciprocity is logo-centric; Homer’s is socio-centric. For Homer there are no standards external to those embedded in the structure of community. In Homer evaluative questions were questions of social fact. The foundations of any arete [excellence, virtue] were predetermined by one’s particular place in society. Owing and oughting were determined by kinship and household obligations. Thus morality and social structure were identical. For Socrates the issue is more complex. He claims that a particular understanding of virtue is a necessary but insufficient condition for defining virtue. What Socrates attempts to offer a universal definition of piety or holiness. The basis of any virtue is there must be a reason for it. Owing and oughting are determined by reasoning and deliberation: As Socrates consistently challenges Euthrypho: “let us examine what we mean” [7a]. Consequently with Socrates, morality and social structure become distinct. The survival of the community, the polis, now depends on the consensus of reason rather than the coercion of kinship.

This is a thought beyond the ken of Homer’s Archaic Age. Socrates’ revolutionary insight is the product of the Greek Enlightenment, and it turns as it were “the world upside down.” Homer’s physical particularity of reciprocity – as kinship and household obligations; is challenged by Socrates’ intellectual universality of reciprocity – as rational and political obligations [11e]. Here Socrates makes the novel and radical suggestion that piety and justice are somehow related. Consequently, morality and social structure separate. Significantly, arete [excellence, virtue] is no longer singularly connected to ethos as habit or custom. Rather ethos is a matter of character. 

Thus to use a Hesiodic metaphor - a chaos [gap] emerges and complexity enters. Moral disagreement in the fifth and fourth centuries not only arises because one set of virtues clashes with another. It is because rival conceptions of the same virtue coexist.

This rivalry generates a shift from a Homeric understanding of The Golden Rule to a Socratic-Platonic definition of The Golden Rule. We cannot examine in detail how Plato makes the shift from Socrates’ need in the early dialogues for a definition of piety and holiness to his own quest in the middle and late dialogues for the intelligible form [idea; eidos] of sensible things such as Justice and the Good. However, what we can do is outline Plato’s attempt in the Republic to

28 Plato is not the first to propose this redefinition of ethos. See, Heraclitus, fr. 119. [D-K]: “Man’s character is his fate.”
29 A. MacIntyre, op. cit., pp. 133-134.
offers a definition of justice as the fundamental virtue for a community. It is upon this definition that the Platonic understanding of The Golden Rule rests.

Plato asks the Socratic question: What is justice? For Plato, this is asking the question – what is the Form of Justice? Moreover he asks, is the Form of Justice related to the Form of the Good? And if so how? Here Plato reminds us of that passage where Socrates tells Euthrypho that even the gods dispute with each other, not about numbers, weights, and lengths but about the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, good and evil. Moreover, can we know justice is good? Are there ethical objects that rational persons can come to agreement on, or as Herodotus quotes from Pindar - is custom [nomos] king of all? Here Plato shifts ground from Socrates’ critique of the Homeric understanding of virtue to a rebuttal of the Sophistic claim that nomos rules entirely, that justice is merely a matter of social convention? What this underscores is a continuing incoherence in the use of evaluative language and whether the virtues are competitive or cooperative, particular or universal

2

Plato

The Reciprocity of Virtue

Plato wants to argue that justice is the fundamental reciprocal virtue for a community. He begins by raising the question, is the Form of Justice related to the Form of the Good? If so how? What Plato wants to do is offer a dialectic that illustrates Justice participates in Goodness and that all reasonable people would concur with this. Here our focus shifts to the debate in the Republic between Socrates and Thrasymachus on justice.

Adkins has noted there is a resemblance between Thrasymachus and the more venal versions of the Homeric hero. “Scratch Thrasymachus and you find Agamemnon,” a man who only wants victory and its spoils for himself. Everyone and everything is to be used and abused in the pursuit of power. Thus, Socrates’ protagonist is a “Thrasymachus” who argues that the rules of justice are merely conventional and are crafted by those with the power to make them. Moreover, it is not to the advantage of an individual to be just. Rather: “Socrates, injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. And, as I said from the first, justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one’s own profit and advantage.” What Thrasymachus proposes is the inversion of The Golden Rule. Might makes right and being unjust is good judgment. So the Sophist, of whom Plato’s Thrasymachus is the type, makes success the only goal of action and makes the acquisition of power to do and to get whatever one wants the content of success. Furthermore, and this is the dagger at the throat of

30 Plato, Euthyphro, 7d.
31 Herodotus, Histories, 3.38.
32 Plato, Republic, 344c.
33 Ibid., 348cd.
Plato’s definition of The Golden Rule, there is no such thing as universal justice-as-such, but only a particular justice as understood by the individual when reflecting in his own self-interest.

This relativism, combined with the claim that a virtue is a quality whose only reciprocity is success, threatens to derail Plato’s project altogether. As Parfit notes, Thrasyvichus is arguing the Self-Interest Theory of Rationality which argues that a course of action can be rational only if it is in one’s self-interest.  

The competitive virtues are elevated above the cooperative ones and Plato’s claim that the virtues are not only compatible with each other but the presence of each requires the presence of all is under trial.

Plato’s only recourse is to ask which life is most valuable and to propose that being just is in one’s self-interest because it leads to happiness. Moreover, justice is valuable as an end in itself and not a means to an end, if the goal of life is happiness. However, is the just person the happy person? If Plato can show that it is the just person who possesses happiness, and that justice is good in it-self apart from consequences, then he can demonstrate that he is the one who has the good life. If Plato can demonstrate this, he will show that the Form of Justice is involved in the Form of the Good with the result that anyone who participates in the first can be excluded from participation in the second. It is this dialectic we need to understand.

To demonstrate the plausibility of reciprocity among the virtues of happiness, justice, and goodness, Plato returns to the basic question, what is justice? He answers it by appealing to his tripartite theory of the soul: its reason, appetites, and emotions. Each he argues has a function and in accord with its function, each has a particular excellence [arete]. Reason pursues wisdom and it performs its task with excellence when it judges wisely in accordance with knowledge. Such knowledge involves knowing the Forms and at its acme the Form of the Good. The appetites function to motivate one to achievement. The emotions function to animate life. Reason’s ultimate function is to guide the appetites and emotions. Thus the exercise of each specific function of the soul is a particular virtue. So the appetites are to accept the restraint imposed by reason and become temperate [sophrosune]; so the emotions when they respond as reason bids them, exhibit themselves as courage [andreia]; and so reason, when it has been disciplined by mathematics and dialectics, it grasps what the form of justice is, what the form of beauty is, and what the Form of the Good is. Once reason grasps all three, it exhibits the virtue of wisdom [sophia]. Finally, these three virtues can only be exhibited when a fourth, the virtue of justice [dikaiosune] is exhibited. If justice emerges within a soul a person will be happy and have a harmonious soul. Unhappiness is merely the lack of harmony within the soul.

But what has any of this to do with justice writ large? Plato’s answer is that the soul’s harmonious division of functions is itself Justice. He uses this image to make the connection between the harmonious, internally just person and the socially just person. Moreover, the harmonious soul is also a metaphor for the Just state, just as the disharmonious soul is a

metaphor for the Unjust state. In both the political and psychological realm conflict and virtue are mutually incompatible and exclusive. Both within the city and within the soul virtue cannot be in conflict with virtue. The presence of each requires the presence of all. Thus, Plato’s answer to Thrasymachus is the unjust man does not have happiness after all. This is so because it is more profitable to be just than unjust. Why is this so? The just soul is harmonious and happy while the unjust soul is disharmonious and unhappy.

Reflection on the etymology Justice [dike] may help grasp what Plato is claiming. Dike basically means the order of the universe. The just man [dikaios] is one who respects and does not violate cosmic order. Moreover, Justice requires reference to or belief in a moral order [harmonia] in the universe. If there is moral order or justice in the universe or world soul, then there is moral order in the individual soul and in the state. For Plato, Thrasymachus’ mistake is he uses the word just without any reference to or belief in the moral order of cosmos, soul, and state.

The general state of incoherence of evaluative language escalates as the fifth century BCE comes to a close at Athens. It is possible for Sophists like Thrasymachus to ask if it is or is not justice to do what the established order requires. Here we have moved beyond the Homeric notion held by Euthyphro to be just [dikaios] is not to transgress that social order, however misconceived, at least according to Plato, he thinks his understanding of piety to be justice. Socrates and Euthyphro, Plato and Thrasymachus have sifted and shifted the debate concerning the reciprocal virtues of piety and justice considerably. Moral thinking and action about The Golden Rule takes on an increasing ethical rather than social hue as well. It is to this topic we now turn.

What needs to be understood is that any adequate account of The Golden Rule in Classical Athens would be impossible without considering its intellectual and social context. Intellectual skills assign persons their place in the ethical-political order and with it their social identity. We have entered a culture where morality and intellect are identical. Moreover, evaluative questions are framed as rhetorical and dialectical problems rather than problems of social fact. No longer do social habits solely dictate how men and women are to be treated and regarded if they fail custom and they are to treat and regard others if they fail.

Greek moral vocabulary has undergone change. So how does The Golden Rule hold up to evaluative incoherence and redefinition? What does Plato have to say about an ethics of reciprocity, especially in the wake of Euthyphro, let alone Thrasymachus, Glaucoc, and Callicles? Socrates and Plato employ a received set of virtue-words in fifth century Greek and a received set of virtues and reformulated them. The result is that anyone who unreflectively relies on ordinary language, on what they have been taught, or what they boldly propose are trapped by Socrates and Plato in evaluative inconsistency. However, in the wake of this Plato offers a coherent theory of reciprocity grounded in definition, dialectic, the Theory of Forms, and a tripartite theory of the soul.
The argument of Plato’s Golden Rule is dialectically complex but reciprocally straightforward. Plato’s theory of the reciprocity of cooperative virtue is based on the dual notions of Self-Interest and Mutual Interest Rationality which combines justice in the soul [psuche] to justice within a state [polis]. The dialectic of his argument unfolds in this way: 1] Just actions follow from a soul in harmony; 2] since a harmonious soul is a happy soul; 3] it follows that happiness is a natural good; 4] since this is so, justice is a natural good; 5] which means justice is not good for its consequences but is good in-itself; 6] because justice participates in goodness. At the core of Plato’s view of reciprocity is the virtue justice. Justice radiates out like the spokes of a wheel to kindred virtues such as piety, prudence, courage, and wisdom. The rub is being a good person and being a good citizen is central, but without knowledge of the variety of possible practices of virtue, reciprocity would be impossible. Thus in order for The Golden Rule to work evaluative rationality is necessary. It is also important to view the virtues as cooperative rather than competitive. Otherwise the reciprocity of justice and its kindred virtues would not be possible.

In nuce, the Socratic-Platonic-Sophistic self transcends the limitations of social roles and puts those roles in question. This suggests that for Socrates, Euthrypho, Plato, and Thrasymachus ethics and evaluative judgment as something distinct from kinship judgements based on custom exist. Correlatively, the Platonic self differs from the Homeric heroic self and the Sophistic emotivist self. The presupposition of the Platonic self’s existence is that there is a grounded moral order which requires from us the pursuit of ethical ends. This is based upon a rationality that provides our evaluative judgements with the property of truth or falsity in ethical and political affairs. What is alien to our modern conceptions of virtue is the intimate connection Plato makes between reciprocity, the cooperative virtues, and such metaphysical theories as the Forms, the tripartite soul, and the rational soul.

Summary

This summary of The Golden Rule in Athenian society is limited to an analysis of reciprocity in Socrates and Plato. What reciprocity is as justice [dikaiosune] and what it is not, shall be delineated through Green’s four topics:

I .What does The Golden Rule say?

In the Athens of Socrates, Plato, and the Sophists reciprocity is formulated in terms of a distinction between nature [phusis] and custom [nomos]. This distinction was applied, in particular, to justice. Is justice something good by nature? Or is it merely convention? If justice is good by nature, as Socrates and Plato argue, then reciprocal justice must be applied universally as a matter of ethical and political order. If justice is a matter of custom, as Thrasymachus proposed, consult a state’s laws or look to the customs of its people. Justice may or may not be reciprocal. Consequently, justice need not be applied universally as a matter of ethical and political order. Thus The Golden Rule is formulated negatively and positively. To follow or not follow it is a matter of evaluative choice. It is formulated as a dialogue. This genre was chosen
by Plato for rhetorical and dialectical reasons – through argument the truth or falsity of evaluative issues could be adjudicated. The semantic range of a Platonic dialogue’s language and formulation is extraordinary. Indeed, it has been an emblematic and paradigmatic discourse since its appearance. New formulations of The Golden Rule emerge out of the general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in fifth century BCE Athens. When The Golden Rule is formulated it is generally within the context of the problem of reciprocal justice: is justice a natural cooperative virtue or a conventional competitive virtue? If the former, approximations of The Golden Rule always apply; if the latter, The Golden Rule need not apply.

II. What does the Golden Rule mean?

A. Literature. The context of the Golden Rule is the Platonic dialogue. Within this setting, The Golden Rule is invoked by dialectical argument on the nature and application of the virtues, particularly justice. All questions of reciprocity arise within this literary-dialectical framework. The dialogue does not constrain possible formulations of the Golden Rule. Rather it enhances it. The dialogue is the stage upon which The Golden Rule unfolds. Upon this stage it is also constantly re-formulated.

B. Interpretation. The Golden Rule, understood as reciprocal justice, plays an important role in the interpretative tradition. Socrates, Plato and their Sophistic interlocutors are re-defining an inherited Homeric definition of reciprocity. In turn, their definitions will be assessed by later philosophers and theologians. The interpretive tradition does advance some understandings of The Golden Rule at the expense of others. The interpretive tradition does distinguish between reciprocity and retaliation. Plato’s Euthyphro offers a good example of the debate on this issue. Homeric and Sophistic reciprocity justifies retaliation while Socratic and Platonic reciprocity generally does not. In the Platonic dialogues exchanges abound concerning excessive or ridiculous inferences from the Golden Rule proposed by Sophists. Here contrast Thrasymachus’ view of justice with that taken by Plato.

III. How does The Golden Rule Work?

A. Social Consequence

The Golden Rule is directed to all citizens of the Athenian polis. The promotion of reciprocal justice by Socrates and Plato suggests that they saw it as an ideal virtue for self and state praxis across all citizen classes. Reciprocity need not apply to all gender and social classes, however. The Golden Rule presupposes a high degree of literacy and education. The authority behind The Golden Rule is ultimately nature [physis] although its justification is through an appeal to reason. Socratic-Platonic reciprocity applies universally.
B. Actor and Recipient

The assumed actor and recipient of reciprocity is the citizen of the state. For Socrates and Plato, it is assumed that the actor is an autonomous moral agent whose rationality is the basis for actions taken toward the other. Rationality is the authority that prescribes action. Desires and emotions could not be the basis for reciprocal actions. They are incapable of evaluative judgment. Thus the actor rationally determines how he wants or would want to be treated with an ethic of reciprocity based on justice the authoritative guide. The Golden Rule does not apply to a deity or other superhuman beings. The appearance of a god in the Platonic dialogues often discloses incoherence in moral standards and vocabulary. As Socrates reminds Euthrypho, the gods stand apart from the affairs of humans.

C. Reflexivity and Reciprocity

The Golden Rule as defined by Socrates and Plato only implicitly includes reflexivity as a component of reciprocity. There is a tension here but the just man would be aware of the notion to treat others as you would treat yourself. The story of the Ring of Gyges in Republic [359d-360b] and Glaucon’s reflections on the myth [361ad] suggest as much. Here we are invited to imagine a situation in which we could evade all bad consequences for behaving unjustly because we are invisible. The answer is, if justice is the true good, it follows that it would be better to refrain from unjust actions. We would be happier being just although we would have to do without many things we desire. At this point the Golden Rule is not equivalent to the precept: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Such a quasi-formulation would have to await Aristotle. The basic reference point for The Golden Rule is a rational self who practices justice toward the other. Reciprocity does not presuppose or require empathy. Nor does it exclude empathy. For Socrates and Plato empathy is a ‘rational’ desire and is thus a virtue.

D. Violence and Oppression

As articulated by the Platonic Socrates, the Golden Rule generally does not sanction violence and oppression. However, when political and moral orders are transgressed justice requires a restoration of order for the preservation of society itself. Again there are rational limits to Platonic reciprocity.

IV. How does the Golden Rule matter?

A. Systemic Significance.

The Golden Rule is an important component within Socratic and Platonic virtue ethics. Since the practice of justice is foundational to the ethical functioning of self and society, reciprocity is central to the maintenance of Classical Greek culture. As one reads the Platonic dialogues, it is clear that The Golden Rule is defined within the context of the myths, beliefs, and rituals of Greek society. Indeed, these component parts give reciprocity its coherence. Justice is the
prerequisite for The Golden Rule. Without this core virtue reciprocity could not be practiced. Concomitantly, there are no specific teachings, a catechism of The Golden Rule. In this sense, The Golden Rule depends on the knowledge of how to practice virtue. There are no other rules, precepts, or values that supersede reciprocity or The Golden Rule. Within Classical Greek culture, there were challenges to the Socratic-Platonic theory of reciprocity. These came from two sources: first the Homeric tradition; and secondly the Sophistic movement.

B. Consequences of Failure and Success

For Socrates and Plato, failure to implement The Golden Rule on the basis of ignorance or disobedience results in loss of virtue. Plato is keen to use myth, traditional beliefs and rituals, and threat of political sanction to explain the consequences involved in unjust behavior. The Myth of Er in the Republic is perhaps the best known example of this. Here he uses Pythagorean teachings on the judgment of the soul at death and its reincarnation to highlight the punishments involved in living an unjust life. Rewards and benefits are promised if a person practices reciprocal justice. The ascent and immortality of the soul proposed at the close of the Phaedo and in the Speech of Diotima in the Symposium are the consequences of living a just life. Immortality guarantees escape from the wheel of rebirth and an eternal life with the Forms of Goodness, Beauty, and Justice.

C. Exceptions

Socrates and Plato do not justify flouting The Golden Rule. As noted above, Plato argues in the Republic [361ad] that the just person may languish in prison, dirty, cold, and half-starved but if he has justice he possesses happiness. The just man or woman, despite all, is happier than the unjust man or woman. Plato’s rationale is that this person is the one who has the good life. His justification for this claim is that the Form of Justice participates in the Form of the Good, and that no one involved in the former can be excluded from the latter. Consequently, it is not permissible to treat others unjustly. Thus it is not permissible to treat others as you do not want them to treat you unless a person transgresses the political and moral orders. There are just limits to reciprocity. It is a mean not an excess.

3

Aristotle

The Reciprocal Virtues

If there is a Golden Rule in Aristotle it would approximate: ‘Love the other as another self.’
Some of Aristotle’s most important passages develop from the aphorism that the friend or loved one is ‘another’ self [allos autos or heteros autos]. He brings in this notion in order to characterize a broad range of attitudes that are typical of what we in this study call The Golden Rule. What they have in common is that they all seem to derive from virtuous attitudes an individual has to him/herself which reciprocally are given to the other.

Aristotle inherits Plato’s belief in the unity and harmony of both the individual soul and the city-state. He also claims that society, the state, or city-state [polis] exists by nature [phusei] not by custom [nomos]. The final cause [telos] of its genesis is to provide the conditions necessary for human existence. Add to this that man is by nature a social animal what results is the society is prior in nature to each of us. Indeed, society is prior to understanding any particular person, it came into being for the sake of living well, and its function is to serve human welfare. Thus, Aristotle views conflict as something to be avoided or managed. The means to this end [telos] is accomplished through the practice of reciprocity and its kindred virtues which include friendship, justice, good wishes and actions, lawfulness, and fairness. He adds to this the argument that one cannot possess any of these virtues of character without possessing all the others. Reciprocity involves the ability to choose ‘another self’ in acts of friendship, justice, good wishes and actions, lawfulness, and fairness. If one is able to do this then the most cooperative of virtues are set in place rendering conflict nugatory, thereby preserving the state.

The key to understanding Aristotle here is that excellence of character and intelligence cannot be separated and that there is a connection between practical intelligence and the virtues of character. He claims that human beings, like all other species, have a specific nature with certain aims and goals. Thus humans move by nature toward a specific end [telos]. For Aristotle, every activity, inquiry, and practice aims at some good. Thus, he sets himself the task of giving an account of the good one local and particular in society, state, the city-state [polis]; the other universal in the cosmos [kosmos]. What then does the good turn out to be? Aristotle calls it eudaimonia – variously translated as happiness, blessedness, prosperity, and flourishing. Happiness is a kind of existence where the good is a complete human life lived optimally. To acquire this state of soul [hexis], a person has to place the virtues at the center of life. The virtues are the possession of qualities which enable a person to attain happiness. If one lacks these virtues movement toward happiness is thwarted. Why? For Aristotle, the outcome of the exercise of right virtue is a choice which results in right action.

**Reciprocity, the Self, and Others**

Plato asserts that the concern for the good of others promotes the just person’s own interests. However, he does not say much to connect my interest with the good of others. Aristotle’s discussion of reciprocity as friendship argues for a connection. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds

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35 *NE.*, 1166a1-b29. It is clear from the *Eudemian Ethics* that ‘the friend is another self’ is based on the proverbial phrase ‘another Heracles’, which was presumably said by the hero himself in some story. cf. *EE.*, 1245a30.

of friendship concerned with advantage, pleasure, and goodness. The first two kinds are easy to understand from a purely self-interested point of view. Often we can advance our own interests more efficiently if we can rely on help from others for mutual advantage. We might also take an interest in other people because we enjoy their company. Here our concern depends on what we enjoy, not on any concern for the other person. The third kind of friendship involves concern for the other because of herself and for her own sake, not as a source of advantage or pleasure. Aristotle also argues that this concern for others promotes one’s own good.

He argues that we can see how love of self requires concern for the good of others, once we understand what is meant by self-love and self-interest. What we think is in our self-interest depends on what we think the Self is, and what sorts of desires need to be satisfied in order to achieve its interests. Here Aristotle argues that the self is naturally social, so that something is missing from our good if all our concerns are merely self-interested. In a concern for other people, we become interested in aims and activities that would otherwise not interest us, and become capable of activities that would otherwise be beyond us. This what Aristotle means when he says that for the virtuous person a friend of the best sort is ‘another self.’ If we are virtuous, we care about the friend in the way we care about ourselves. In doing so we take an interest that we would not otherwise take in what the friend does. Thus, concern for others does not interfere with our interests, but expands them.

The type of friendship which Aristotle has in mind is that which embodies a shared recognition of and pursuit of several goods. It is this sharing which is essential and primary to the constitution of any form of self and community, whether household [οἶκος] or city [πόλις]. The social nature of human beings is the basis of justice. Justice is another’s good. In this sense justice is not a separable virtue, but the whole of virtue insofar as it is practiced toward other people. Since virtuous people value the good of other people for the sake of the other people themselves, they also choose virtuous actions for their own sakes. Aristotle describes this attitude to virtuous actions by saying that virtuous people choose them ‘because they are fine’, or ‘for the sake of the fine.’

Without friendship there is no justice, which is the rewarding of desert and the repairing of failures within a relationship or community. Thus, friendship is the sharing of all in the common project of creating and sustaining the life of the polis, a sharing incorporated in the immediacy of an individual’s particular friendship. As such, friendship involves affection. This arises within a relationship defined in terms of a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods.

Aristotle claims that human beings have a function, which is “an active life that has a rational principle,” one part obedient to a rational principle, the other part possessing reason and

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37 Ibid., 1097a28-b21; Politics, 1252a1-1253a39.
38 Ibid., 1170b3-19.
39 Ibid., 1129b11-1130a5.
exercising thought. As Aristotle states further that the *polis* is concerned with the whole of life, not with this or that good but with the good as such. Recently Charles Kahn has taken passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* 8 and 9 to develop a theory of Aristotelian altruism. He argues that the basis for the friendship of human beings with one another is dependent upon the presence in each rational human being of the principle of the active intellect [*nous poietikos*]. The joint presence of intelligence is the basis of human friendship, that the other person is another self because my true self, and your true self, are identical - which is the *nous poietikos* shared by a rational community.

The performance of The Golden Rule is the basis for a happy life [*eudaimon*] for each human being. Here Aristotle asserts that freedom is a necessary condition for achieving one’s *telos*. Slaves, unlike free persons, have their tasks less determined for them because they have less an understanding of what they ought to be doing. Free persons as rational agents, however, are more likely to have their activities determined by their concepts of the good life and their commitment to it. Thus, it is appropriate for each of us to maximize the good life:

> The end of the good state is the good life…The state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honorable life…Political society exists for the sake of noble actions…those who contribute to such a society have a greater share in it than those who have the same or greater freedom or nobility of birth, but are inferior in political virtue.

Aristotle’s ethical theory turns primarily around what the citizen is and does, the sort of life he or she leads, which end in the various moral states of character, or activity of soul, developed. Here Aristotle says, “he who participates in rational principle [*koinonon logou*] enough to apprehend, but to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature.” On the contrary, he who has a rational principle is concerned about the well-being of one’s *genos* - as a rational community or *polis*.

Aristotle asserts a communal commitment to the achievement of human happiness within a community, a state. What he adds is that since free persons are the most rational members of the household, they are more conscious of the duties which they must impose upon themselves for the achievement of such a kingdom of ends. On the other hand, the less rational, less responsible members of the household are not conscious of their moral duties, and far more likely to perform random actions. In *nuce*, the non-rational members of society are the source of political instability, if not a model for the explanation for the indeterminacy of the material elements in the universe.

Reciprocity as Friendship

Aristotle’s definition of reciprocity is essentially good friendship, and friendship of this type is always reciprocal. Those who are good friends act with the intention of advancing the happiness of one another. This plays out in two ways - as an activity and as a virtue. When he defines it as an activity he does so as one defines a friend:

Friends must bear good will and good wishes for one another. 46

Friends must bear good will and good wishes, and they must do so for the sake of their goodness, their usefulness, or their pleasantness, for these three qualities distinguish the lovable objects under discussion. 47 Here he begins with the object of love:

Not everything seems to be loved but only the lovable, and this seems to be either good, or pleasant, or useful. But the useful would seem to be that by means of which some good or pleasure comes to be so that the good and the pleasant would be lovable as ends. 48

Love is for the sake of the lovable and the lovable can be divided into the good, the useful, and the pleasant. Moreover, the useful is a means and the good and pleasant are ends. Aristotle also considers the elements of good wishes and their reciprocity. Friendship requires good wishes and their reciprocity.

...love for a lifeless object we do not call friendship. For there is no reciprocal love nor is there a good wish for the other. To bear a good wish for wine would be ridiculous. If anything, we wish that it may keep so that we may drink it. But we say that it is necessary to wish the good for a friend for his sake. 49

Another example of reciprocity would be the distinction between reciprocity, good will, and friendship:

To those who wish to be good we ascribe only good will, if the same wishes do not arise from another. For friendship lies in reciprocal good will. 50

43 Met., 12.10.1075a20-23.
44 Politics, 1280b39.
46 NE, 1156a3-5.
47 Ibid., 1155b18-19.
48 Ibid., 1155b18-21.
49 Ibid., 1155b27-31.
50 Ibid., 1155b32-34.
Thus, even if we wish good will for another, we cannot say we are friends unless the good will is reciprocated.

Aristotle also argues that friends must recognize their good wishes for one another:

Or must we add that they do so without recognition? For many people bear good wishes for those whom they have not seen but suppose to be good or useful. And someone among these may feel the same toward them. These people seem to bear good will for one another. But how could some one call them friends when they do not recognize how they feel about themselves? 51

These passages convey the sequence of events in the development of reciprocity- affection, good will, and friendship. They also suggest a distinction between essential and accidental friendship based upon the loves exhibited in them. Such loves are distinguished by their objects:

The lovable objects differ as species from one another, and therefore so do their loves and friendships. There are therefore three species of friendship equal in number to the lovable objects. For in accordance with each object there is reciprocal love and it is recognized. Those loving one another wish what is good to one another in the respect in which they love one another. 52

The qualification is that because of these qualifications in lovable objects, some friends bear good will for others reciprocally, while some friends offer good wishes to others self-referentially. The first acts for others essentially, advancing the good for others as an end; while second acts accidentally, advancing the good of another as a means to some other end. This is because it is essentially 'a doing unto others what you would done unto you' - that is to say, good will and good wishes, reciprocated and recognized, for the sake of the goodness of another, is The Golden Rule.

Perfect friendship is the friendship of good men and of men who are similar according to their virtue. For they wish things that are good similarly to each other as good men they are essentially good. 53

Hence, the distinction between good friends and useful and pleasant friends is made. It is only with good friends that one friend loves the other for the sake of the other.

Those who wish the good to their friends for the sake of them

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51 Ibid., 1155b34-1156a3.
52 Ibid., 1156a6-10.
53 Ibid., 1156b7-9.
are the most friends, for they do this for their sake and not accidentally.  

Aristotle also claims that we may have good will for the sake of another or for the sake of ourself. Here he distinguishes reciprocal good will from self-referential good will but ultimately good will of either kind is the beginning of friendship. Reciprocal good will consummates in good friendship while self-referential good will ends in either useful or pleasant friendships. Of the three, good friendship is the more stable for it lasts as long as men are good and their virtue endures.

Aristotle further proposes that friendship is a habit [hexis] or activity of the soul, in accordance with a mean, and that it concerns an emotion. But here is careful to make the point that practical wisdom [phronesis] determines this emotional mean. This is why friendship as a habit is virtuous. If friendship were merely based on emotions, it would lack requisite rationality, or rational choice [prohairesis], and thus would not be virtuous. Now since love is a passion and friendship is a habit, it follows that loves divides into two species - a passion and a habit. Of the two, only love that is reciprocal and for the sake of another qualifies as a habit. This is so because friends love what is lovable in each other. Here the quality of being for the sake of another is the crucial one because it relies on rational choice [prohairesis]:

Friends love each other reciprocally from choice and their choice springs from a habit [hexis].

In nuce, for Aristotle, friendship includes three species: that good friendship is the essential species, that good friendship is reciprocal, that such good friendship is a habit based on rational choice according with virtue, and that happiness defines the end of good friendship in that good friends act with the intention of advancing the happiness of the other. What we have here is Aristotle’s Golden Rule in cameo, in miniature.

Reciprocity and the Other

Why does someone enter into a good friendship and acquire virtue? This answer to this question takes us into the center of Aristotle’s theory of reciprocity. The marks of a good friendship begin with a good friendship with oneself. The reason for this is that it is a short step from being a friend to oneself to being a friend for others. Significantly, in being a friend for others one acquires, becomes, is another self [allos autos or heteros autos]. What one comes to acquire as another self are the rational marks of good or excellent friendship, which include the reflective, controlling, discriminating center of his considered attitudes, thoughts, actions, and decisions. It

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54 Ibid., 1156b9-11.
55 Ibid., 1156b11-12.
56 Ibid., 1106b36-1107a2; 1105b25-28.
57 Ibid., 1157b28-29.
58 Ibid., 1155b17-19; 1156a3-5
59 Ibid., 1157b30-31.
60 Ibid., 1166a1-2.
is appropriate to love not only that self in us, but that self in others for it is admirable and wise. It is reasoned love, not a love driven by vulgar opinion. 61

The importance of acquiring another self ultimately rests on two principles: man is a political being, one whose nature is to live with others; 62 and being alive is good and pleasant in itself. 63 Aristotle argues that the happy individual needs a certain kind of friend because the living together that is distinctively human is not simply living in proximity to others of their kind [like herd animals], or in a mutual arrangement designed for human protection and economic advantage, but in living together as rational beings - sharing talk and exchanging thoughts. Indeed, the activity of thought is a vital functioning for humans. It is every bit as much of what we are as respiration, pulse, and metabolic changes and as memory, imagination, desires, emotions, and motor activity, but even more. Intellectual activity is the end [telos] of being human.

Such an end is only optimally possible in reciprocity with another, in reciprocity with another self. Thus the desirability of a good person, of a good friend’s existence, and being aware of it through intellectual activity is a virtue. If one lacks good friends one forfeits happiness. This is why we need friends if we are to be happy. 64

Aristotle further argues that a man and his friend choose to spend their days together doing whatever activities they enjoy most:

And therefore some drink together, and some dice together. Others exercise together and hunt together, and others philosophize together. the individuals spend their days together in whatever they are most fond of in life. 65

Philosophizing together is primary happiness, the other activities secondary happiness. But we establish friendships because we humans mutually find the happiness of other people to be choice worthy, and the primary and secondary happiness of others choice worthy.

It could be argued that Aristotle’s ethics is decidedly self-centered. It is at his own eudaimonia [happiness] that man aims and should aim. Traces of this egoistic view are ample in his account of friendship. It demands a return. Yet, loving is said to be more essential to friendship than being loved; 66 a man wishes well to his friend for his friend’s sake, not as a means to his own

61 Ibid., 166a16-17; 1169a2; 1178a2-6.
62 Ibid., 1169b18-19.
63 Ibid., 1170a19-20.
64 Ibid., 1170a13-b19.
65 Ibid., 1172a3-6.
66 Ibid., 1159a27.
happiness. Indeed, the various forms of friendship mentioned by Aristotle are illustrations of the social nature of man. Friendship is a virtue; it even implies virtue, and is necessary for life.

The most controversial part of Aristotle’s theory is that friendship is based on the love of the good man for himself. But he warns against supposing that self-relation can be an accurate term. He states:

By a metaphor we may say that there is justice - not between a man and himself but between two parts of him.

Here Aristotle is criticizing Plato’s view that justice is essentially a relation within the self. Ultimately, for Aristotle, justice is a relation to another self. The good man wishes and does the best for the intellectual element in him which is most truly himself. It is because the harmonious relation called justice exists within the good man, and because his friend is to him another self, that friendship possesses the characteristics of goodness and justice.

Aristotle’s moral theory has the following significance for our inquiry. As Sir David Ross notes, it is an attempt to break down the antithesis between egoism and altruism, by showing that the egoism of a good man has the characteristics of altruism. Ross argues that Aristotle’s attempts to argue that one can be interested in and sympathize with the other are a failure because it requires two distinct selves. This is a valid point, but it is argued too radically. Aristotle also speaks of treating the other as another self, or as part of themselves. Aristotle is making the point that a woman may so extend her interests that the welfare of another becomes as direct an object of concern as her own well-being. A mother feels pain from her child as if it were the pain of her own body. Here egoism is not only the necessary, but it is also the sufficient condition for reciprocity. The question is what sort of self is it that you love? Here the mother finds her interest in the welfare of her child as a friend, or as the friend as another self.

The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another self. Therefore, just as his own being is choice worthy for him, his friends being is choice-worthy for him in the same or similar way. We agreed that someone’s own being is choice worthy because he perceives that he is good, and this sort of perception is pleasurable in itself. He must, then, perceive his friend’s being together <with his own>, and he will do this when they live together, and share conversation and thought…If then, for the blessedly happy person, being is choice-worthy,

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67 Ibid., 1155b31
68 Ibid., 155b3-5.
69 Ibid., 1138b5-7.
70 Ibid., 1166a1-b29.
71 See, D. Ross, op. cit., p. 251.
72 NE, 1161b28; 1166a32; 1169b6; 1170a6.
73 Ibid., 1161b18.
74 Ibid., 1159a28; 1161b27; 1166a5, 9.
since it is naturally good and pleasant, and if the being of his friend is closely similar to his own, then his friend will also be choice-worthy. Whatever is choice-worthy for him he must possess, since otherwise he will to this extent lack something. Anyone who is to be happy, then, must have excellent friends.  

This sort of concern for others not only promotes one’s own good, but the good of others - as another self.

Aristotle subsequently argues that a human being is naturally social, so that something is missing from our good, and the good of others, if all are concerns are merely self-regarding. Thus, personal friendships set the conditions for the possibility of a more divine friendship, political friendship, which is an extension of friendship as another self. Aristotle is keen to argue that the social nature of human beings is also the basis of justice. Here he agrees with Thrasymachus that justice is another’s good. Hence, justice is not a separable virtue, but the whole of virtue insofar as it is practiced toward the other as another self. Since virtuous people value other people for the sake of the other themselves, they choose virtuous actions for their own sakes, and thus for the sakes of others as other selves.

**Reciprocity as Unanimity**

Aristotle discusses reciprocity most explicitly when he discusses the unanimity required for political friendship. Unanimity is political friendship, a friendship among other selves:

> Unanimity appears to be political friendship...For it concerns our interests and things pertaining to our life.

By acting in unanimity friends act reciprocally. They act for the sake of the happiness of one other. Now unanimity is not similarity of opinion or agreement about just any matter. It is agreement about moral matters:

> Unanimity of such sort occurs among good men. For they are unanimous both with themselves and with one another, being of the same intellect, so to speak. The wishes of such men are steadfast and do not shift like the currents of Euripos. They wish for what is just and for what is in their interests, and they seek these things by common consent.

There is no time to explain how Aristotle defends this claim politically, through his analysis of a variety of constitutions. It must suffice to say that political friendship is a type of kinship based on justice.

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75 Ibid., 1170b3-19.
76 Ibid., 1129b11-1130a5.
77 Ibid., 1167b2-4.
78 Ibid., 1167b4-9.
Friendship appears to exist in accordance with each of the con-
situations to the extent there is justice. 79

Justice is the mark of a reciprocity called political friendship. It is the wish - to do what is good
for the sake of another: 80

The best of justice seems to be a mark of friendship. 81

This is so because Aristotle conceives of justice as both a virtue and an activity. Justice is a habit
[hexit] productive of just wishes and actions. 82 But what actions are just actions? Does a just
individual act for the sake of others or for the sake of himself? Does he act for the sake of
happiness or not? A brief answer is that since justice appears to have the same end as political
friendship, someone who is just aims at happiness when he abides by the law. Moreover, since
the law aims at the common good in a political community, and the common good is happiness,
someone just acts to achieve both his own happiness and the happiness of others. But ultimately,
Aristotle implies that someone who is just reciprocally acts for the sake of another.

Justice is also complete because someone possessing it is
able to exercise virtue in relationship with another and not
only in relation to himself. For many are able to exercise
virtue in their own actions but they are unable to exercise it
in a relationship with another. 83

Thus, justice is the exercise of virtue for the sake of another.

And because of this, because it is in a relationship with
another, justice alone of the virtues seems to be another’s
good, for it does what is in the interest of another, either
someone ruling or someone in the community. 84

Aristotle’s argument is that what is in the interest of another is another’s good. Since justice is in
the interest of another, justice is another’s good. What follows from this is that justice is to wish
and to do what is good for the sake of another. Here Aristotle divides justice into two kinds -
indistributive and corrective justice. Both are the resources necessary for social and political
happiness. Reciprocally, as one person is to another, so what one person receives is to what
another person receives. Correctively, as one person is to another, so what one person receives is

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79 Ibid., 1161a10-11.
80 Ibid., 1166a2-5.
81 Ibid., 1155a28.
82 Ibid., 1129a6-9.
83 Ibid., 1139b31-1130a1.
84 Ibid., 11303-5.
equal to what another person receives. He goes on to say that the worth of persons serves as the principle for determining both the distribution of things, \(^{85}\) and the proportion of things. \(^{86}\)

Significantly, such a conception of worth implies for Aristotle that the motives for distributive and corrective justice are reciprocal – not only altruistic but also egoistic. Nonetheless, justice as the lawful and as the fair is the fundamental mark of political friendship. Both lawful and fair individuals wish for and act for the happiness of themselves and others. Here political friendship and personal friendship have as their goals the happiness of self and other selves based on justice. As such, justice of both kinds entails reciprocity.

This is why Aristotle’s conceptions of reciprocity, friendship, and justice are interrelated. Justice is for the sake of the happiness of self and others, it is reciprocal, and it involves a rational mean similar to friendship. Where they differ is in the nature of the relationship. Those who are friends and those who are just do what is good for one another. However, friends do so out of love while just people do so out of good will. \(^{87}\) Friendship can arise out of justice when they arise out of good will. \(^{88}\) People who are friends concern themselves with the same actions that just people do. They both wish and do what is good for one another. \(^{89}\) Justice and friendship occur together to the extent that people have things in common. \(^{90}\) The difference is that friends act out of love, and just people act out of good will.

Finally, Aristotle argues that friendship with oneself occurs with justice for oneself. We do wish and do what is good for the sake of our-self. \(^{91}\) Hence when we act, we do so as a friend and as someone who is befriended. We are another self to our-self. This self-relation leads to a motivation and activation of political justice as a mark of political friendship. The reciprocity inherent in Aristotle’s theory of justice constitutes a rational choice [prohairesis] that culminates in wishes and actions for the sake of the happiness of others. Thus, Aristotle’s conception of personal friendship and political friendship is ultimately reciprocal and pluralistic. The bond of friendship or unanimity itself is a virtue because in its praxis there is a shared recognition of and pursuit of a good. This sharing is essential and primary to the constitution of any form of community from household to state. Reciprocity is required for that initial constitution.

With Aristotle competition, the agon [contest] is displaced from its Homeric, Sophistic, and Socratic centrality. Plato only anticipated this; Aristotle consummated it. Conflict is not central to a city’s life, is a threat to that life. Thus Homeric and Sophistic competition slips over the horizon. Even Socratic dialectic and Platonic dialogue is no longer the way of inquiry toward truth. This is the ingredient in the life of the human who is eudaimon, flourishing. It is

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 1131a25-29.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 1132a6-10.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 166b32-1167a2.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 1167a3-12.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 1161a10-11.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 1159b29-31.
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 1166a14-17.
contemplation and action upon the virtues of reciprocity that furnishes humans with their specific and ultimate purpose or telos. There is a tension between Aristotle’s view of man as essentially social, political, and metaphysical. This issue is not resolved by Aristotle but will be addressed by Epicureans, Stoics, and later Platonists. They address the tension by resolving it into three possibilities: an Epicurean reciprocity of pleasure; a Stoic reciprocity in duty, or a later Platonic reciprocity of grace and charity.

Summary

I. What does the Golden Rule say?

With Aristotle, The Golden Rule is formulated positively as ‘love the other as another self.’ As the most cooperative of virtues it is offered not as a consequence of dialectic or dialogue, but as lecture and treatise. Aristotle thought he had established a firm foundation for the fundamental ethical precept – reciprocity – from necessary natural truths emerging from his understanding of man as essentially a political animal. The semantic range of its language and formulation is broad and deep. For the attempt was made to link reciprocity teleologically to a wide range of political, social, and ethical concepts. The Golden Rule emerges in a wide-ranging constellation of virtues grounded in reciprocity for the other. It is formulated as: ‘the friend or loved one is another self.’

II. What does the Golden Rule mean?

A. Literature.

The literary context for The Golden Rule is the lecture or treatise. We have left the arena of dialectic and debate and entered the classroom of knowledge [episteme] where essential natures, grasped through universal necessary truths, and logically derivable from certain first principles, emerge. This context does not constrain what The Golden Rule’s means, rather the opposite. It can be applied to a variety of political, social, and ethical contexts.

B. Interpretation.

The Golden Rule reaches the acme of its Ancient Greek formulation in Aristotle. It receives considerable interpretive attention because it is seen as the means by which the household and community is preserved. Aristotle advances the notion that reciprocity is an extension of self-love to others. Thus, the more limited understandings of reciprocity proposed by Homer, Socrates, and Plato are challenged. A distinction between cooperative reciprocity and competitive retaliation is drawn with the consequence that excessive retaliatory inferences drawn from The Golden Rule are censured.

III. How does the Golden Rule work?

A. Social Consequence

92 See, A. MacIntyre, op. cit., pp. 158ff.
The Golden Rule is directed toward members of the state or *polis*. It crosses genders and social classes but excludes non-citizens, slaves and barbarians. It presupposes rationality but not necessarily literacy or a certain level of education. The authority behind Aristotle’s theory of reciprocity is his teleological view of human nature. Humans are by nature rational and it is their end or purpose to treat others virtuously. Consequently, virtuous reciprocity applies at all times to members of the home and community.

B. Actor and Recipient

Actor and recipient are members of the household and community. The Golden Rule assumes that the actor is an autonomous moral agent whose rationality is the basis for actions taken toward the other. Like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle does not base reciprocity on emotivist grounds. Hence the actor’s desires are prescribed by rational judgment [*prohairesis*]. The actor determines how to be treated not the tradition *per se*. Reciprocity does not apply to Aristotle’s God – the Unmoved Mover of *Metaphysics* Lambda.

C. Reflexivity and Reciprocity

The Golden Rule as proposed by Aristotle includes reflexivity as a component of reciprocity. Thus The Golden Rule in Aristotle approximates the precept ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ His formulation is ‘Love the other as another self.’ Reciprocity’s initial reference point is the actor not the recipient of action but since the recipient is an extension of yourself, the distinction between actor and recipient almost collapses. Reciprocity does not presuppose but also does not censure empathy if rationally grounded. The limits of reciprocity apply to others who are not members of household and community. Although as Aristotle’s theory is itself interpreted, a more universal reading is offered. Reciprocity would apply to the other in general.

D. Violence and Oppression

Aristotle’s theory of The Golden Rule does not sanction violence or oppression against others. Aristotle is keen to obviate both because they are injurious to society and the self. Circumstances may make punishment acceptable since virtue is a mean between excess and deficiency. Thus if someone is excessive or deficient, violent or oppressive in action, punishment is warranted on the basis of justice and law.

IV. How does the Golden Rule matter?

A. Systemic Significance

The Golden Rule is central in Aristotle’s philosophy. If Alexander the Great and the Diodochi are valid indicators, its application to Hellenistic culture was peripheral at best. The coherence of The Golden Rule is ultimately a metaphysical and ethical one. Its prerequisites are human rationality. Without the ability to make rational judgements in the political, social, and psychological realms The Golden Rule would be rendered inoperative. Many ethical, social, and political teachings and practices depend on reciprocity. Reciprocity has little connection for Aristotle with the myths, beliefs, and rituals of the many religions of the Hellenistic world.
Indeed, he is keen to separate ethics from religion. Aristotle offers numerous illustrations of The Golden Rule in theory and action. For Aristotle, there are no other rules that supersede reciprocity. However, within the inherited culture there remains a tension between Aristotle’s cooperative virtues and the competitive virtues of Homer, the Sophists, Skeptics, and Cynics. Skeptics and Cynics espouse apathy and self-reliance as the principal virtues. Aristotle would view both as inimical to the preservation of society and thus combative virtues.

B. Consequences of Failure and Success.

The consequences of ignoring, disobeying, of failing to implement The Golden Rule would be political and social chaos as well as personal unhappiness. Questions of negative religious judgements and punishment in a next world are not mentioned by Aristotle. If his ethics and politics of reciprocity were applied to society, he would advocate social and legal constraints on non-practitioners of The Golden Rule. The consequences of fulfilling The Golden Rule are individual happiness and social harmony. The benefit promised is the good society.

C. Exceptions.

Aristotle would not justify flouting The Golden Rule. In general, it is not permissible to treat others as you do not want them to treat you. When transgression of The Golden Rule is injurious to the welfare of society an exception is warranted. Exceptions to reciprocity are only justified legally. This exception suggests how central reciprocity is to the maintenance of collective and individual happiness [eudaimonia].
3.

THE GOLDEN RULE IN GRECO-ROMAN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY [2]

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Introduction

We left our earlier discussion with Aristotle addressing the general state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Athenian culture. His attempt to resolve this incoherency both succeeded and failed. Virtues such as friendship, courage, self-restraint, and justice were accepted as cooperative virtues under the aegis of reciprocity. His avowal of pleasure as a basis for reciprocity met resistance, however. 1 Skeptics, Cynics, Stoics, and later Platonists agreed on one point. Aristotle’s crucial failure lay in his rehabilitation of pleasure as a basis for reciprocity. Aristotle devoted two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* [VII and X] to correcting negative views about pleasure. In general, he proposes that pleasures are good and desirable. In Book Seven, he argued that pleasure had been discredited by the false view of the coarsest pleasures as paradigmatic. Book Ten corrects the hedonist theory of Eudoxus by arguing for a distinction between higher [purer] versus lower pleasures with the former functioning as legitimate virtues. 2 Here Epicurus follows Aristotle’s lead and grounds the virtue of reciprocity in the pursuit of pleasure.

I

The Golden Rule: The Greco-Roman World
Epicureans and Stoics

1

Epicureans

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1 Only schools such as the Skeptics and Cynics resisted Plato’s and Aristotle’s domestication of the Homeric and Sophistic virtues. Each championed apathy and self-reliance as the sole virtue. However, neither the Skeptic’s tranquility based on bracketing judgements [*epoche*], nor the Cynic’s self-reliance based on radical *askesis* form a legitimate foundation for reciprocity. Hence these options fall outside the horizons of our discussion of the Golden Rule.

2 *NE.*, 1152b1-1154b34; 1172a19-1176a29.
Reciprocity and Pleasure

If there is a Golden Rule in Epicureanism it would approximate: ‘Pleasure friends as they would
pleasure you.’

Epicureans accept the premise that man is a creature of desires and each desire creates happiness. Desire is determined by its end, and whether we seek to attain or avoid that end. Reason supplies us with means by which the end is realized. Our understanding of the world in terms of desires entails the belief that wherever desire exists, there must also be the desire of an individual to pursue and sustain it. If humans are taken as fundamentally a desiring animal, reason distinguishes those desires which may be pursued from those which may not.

The main problem which the Epicurean addresses is whether anything distinctively moral can emerge from individual desires. The solution to this problem is to present reciprocity as the conquest of the solipsism of desire. Reciprocity is the recognition of the autonomous existence of other selves. The individual is not a cunning desirer locked up inside a body from which there is no escape. He is part of a field of desires. He must be concerned in the outcome of all the desires within the field he inhabits. Such a concern will not come to him merely as the result of rational calculation; he must be equipped with special desires which make it natural to him. In Epicureanism, these desires were seen as arising from a reciprocal feeling called friendship.

Aristotle argues that the virtues are parts of happiness based on the claim we have sufficient reason to be virtuous, and that a virtuous person must choose virtuous action for its own sake. Hence, our virtuous choices and actions result in friendship and justice. If it cannot be proven that virtue is not a part of happiness, then it cannot be proven that virtue really deserves to be chosen for its own sake, and it cannot be proven that we have sufficient reason to be virtuous, to be friendly, and to be just. Epicurus rejects this argument. ³ Since he regards the ultimate good as pleasure understood as the absence of pain and anxiety, any other good is only instrumentally valuable. ⁴ Reciprocity and friendship, for example, are good only because they promote or maintain the condition of ataxaria - tranquility - or promote and maintain this condition.

Here we have the foundation of the Epicurean version of The Golden Rule. Reciprocity is purely desirous and instrumental. Epicurus argues that we can defend the virtues even if we take a purely instrumental attitude toward them. He defends his argument by advising the regulation of desires so that we do not depend on external conditions for happiness. Thus temperance and friendship are valued very highly. Temperance because Epicureans do not fear the loss of worldly goods; friendship because in a society of friends they find mutual aid and pleasure in their pursuit of tranquility. Epicurus’ arguments for the pleasures of reciprocity suggest that he offers no positive reason to care about the good of others for its own sake, as a good in itself.

³ Plutarch, Against Colotes, 1108c.
⁴ Epicurus = Diog. Laert., 10.140.
Here friendship is a means to some other good and this good is egoistic for it is a means to the pleasures of tranquility.

If the Epicurean is indifferent to the interest to others as a good in itself, if she has no reason for doing any good for others except when it is beneficial to some further benefit to herself and her own pleasure. The highest form of social life for Epicurus is friendship - a view which is distinctive in a philosophy that regards the individual as the atom of society. But by friendship he meant personal friendship, not political friendship. Political life is a prison from which the sage will keep clear. 5 Only a quiet life in retirement from public affairs ensures the pleasures of happiness. 6 Hence, friendship for Epicurus arises out of a notion of justice understood as a compact not to harm or be harmed. 7 In this sense:

The just man is most free from trouble, but the unjust man abounds in trouble. 8 This concept of justice is not akin to Aristotle’s or Rousseau’s social contract. 9 People have no obligation to act justly because of any moral or social obligation. Respect of the rights of others rests solely on an egoistic calculus based on self-interest and self-protection. One abjures hurting others if they agree not to harm you. In brief, justice is desirable for the freedom and pleasure it brings from fears of mental distress and physical harm. Moreover, one acts justly because it ensures tranquility [ataxia].

Epicurus’ concept of justice readily explains his theory of reciprocity. The reciprocity of friendship is useful and beneficial because of its instrumental value. It ensures that the pleasures of happiness are required:

Friendship dances round the world, announcing to us all that we should bestir ourselves for the enjoyment of happiness. 10

Friendship is unconditionally the highest of earthly goods. 11 It is far more important with whom we eat and drink than what we eat and drink. 12 Although Epicurus claims friendship desirable for its own sake, 13 that philanthropy is to be pursued, and that one can attain pleasure from helping a friend without hope of any benefits, the reason why one has friends has as its basis the pleasures of self-interest. 14 Cicero reports that one portion of the school, and that the least consistent, maintained that friendship is pursued for the sake of its own use and pleasure as a
kind of unselfish love. 15 Here it was proposed that among the wise there exists a tacit agreement requiring them to love one another as much as they love themselves. 16 But even here altruistic friendship has as its source egoistic motives based on self-interest.

The Epicureans argued that reciprocal friendship grounded on utility is not inconsistent with holding it in the highest esteem. This is because friendly associations with others afford a feeling of security which results in the most pleasurable of circumstances. Cicero notes that this connection optimally exists when friends love one another as themselves. Thus, it follows that self-love and love of a friend must be equally strong. 17 In the case of emergency the sage will not shrink from suffering the greatest pains, even death, for his friend. 18

Critics, such as Cicero, claimed that such is inconsistent with Epicurean hedonism; that Epicurus has united under the term pleasure two quite different kinds of desire - positive enjoyment and absence of pain. 19 It is difficult to square the notion that absence of pain entails pleasure, or even more that the absence of pain brought on by friendship may bring with it the greatest pains, including death. If the latter principle holds, then Epicurean friendship is altruistic after all!

It has often been noted that the Epicurean philosophy is deficient in coherence and consistency. This objection is not without foundation. However, Epicurus did not approach ethical problems with complete cogency. Epicurus’ strongest plea is a path to happiness. Here we take our cue. Epicureanism offers us as almost a thorough-going egoistic, hedonistic, and utilitarian ethic encountered in Greco-Roman antiquity. The memory of past pleasures and the anticipation of future pleasures can mitigate present sufferings. 20 Epicurus says:

For the virtues are naturally linked with living pleasurably, and living pleasurably is inseparable from them. 21

Cicero’s Torquatus puts it very succinctly - since pleasure is the only thing which is good in itself, prudence, justice, moderation, and courage have value only if they are a means to pleasure. 22 This association between virtue and pleasure results in the pursuit of friendship and the claim by Epicurus that:

Friendship is an immortal good. 23

15 Cicero, de Fin., 1.20.69.
16 ibid., 1. 70.
17 ibid., 1.20.67.
18 ibid., 1.20.65.
19 ibid., 2.20.
20 Epicurea [Usener], 437.
21 Ep. ad Men., 132.
22 Cicero, de Fin., 1.42-43.
23 Sentences [Vat.], 78.
Here Epicurus is keen not to suggest that the interests of others should be preferred to or evaluated independently of the interests of the agent. The thrust of his hedonism is thoroughly egoistic and self-regarding.

Critics of Epicurus and Epicureanism abound in ancient sources and such criticisms offer us a fruitful analysis of our topic - reciprocity. First, can an egoistic ethic form a valid basis for theories of friendship, and perhaps even egotistic friendship? Secondly, can the wise person find pleasure in the company of his friend apart from any further instrumental benefits? Thirdly, can friendship be treated differently from justice? The general response to these questions, as exemplified by Cicero, is that it is difficult to see how such pleasures can be justified.

If an Epicureans happiness consists in pleasure taken in his friends, to which no other means to tranquility can be substituted, then a strictly hedonist conception of happiness must be false. Furthermore, the love of friendship, adumbrated by Aristotle, may bring fears and anxieties about the welfare of friends that an Epicurean rejects. Therefore, if we have no such fears and anxieties, we do not have the attitudes that are expected of and by friends. Finally, if we work out the consequences of the Epicurean case for the instrumental value of friendship, is it not clear that we would find objections to the Epicurean view that every good other than pleasure only has only instrumental value? If so, Epicurus would have to abandon his argument against Plato’s and Aristotle’s claim that virtue is to be chosen for its own sake apart from its effects on pleasure and pain.

2

Stoics

Reciprocity, Reason, and Duty

If there is a Stoic definition of The Golden Rule it would read: ‘Do unto others what duty commands be done unto you.’

One of the paradoxes of regarding human beings as creatures of desire is that such a philosophy often provokes a profound distrust of desire. Even the Epicureans saw this. Thus, their policy of the maximum satisfaction of desires led them to the minimization of desires. The Stoics added a further reason for distrusting desire. The pursuit of any objects of desire is a morally ambiguous operation. Needs, on the other hand are morally sanctioned. It is legitimate to satisfy needs, just so long as the conception of need is not extended too far. It is this movement from desires, to needs, to what is rationally needed launches the Stoic notion of reciprocity as a duty of reason.

24 Cicero, Fin., 2.69-71.
25 ibid., 2.66-69.
Much of the strength of Stoicism results from the manner in which it takes over ordinary value words and inflates them into metaphysical tenants. Sometimes these words go in triplets, such as reciprocity, reason, and duty. For the Stoics, reciprocity describes an individual’s duty to meet what is rationally needed by other individuals. A duty is an act which recognizes the needs of others. In a Stoic environment, needs are freed from even the most austere kinds of objections. A need is not a desire. It is a necessity – something everyone must have. Thus, reciprocity is the duty to provide to others what they rationally require for happiness.

Here we encounter the question why Stoics are attracted to the term-need. Such questioning opens up interesting variations of what is Stoic meliorism. If our needs are met, defined as duty, we shall be happy. This not a particularly novel insight but it becomes rather more so if it is converted. If we are not happy, then one or more of our dutiful needs have been met. If we are not happy, there must be some reason for it. A novel insight resides here which allows the Stoics to offer their version of The Golden Rule: ‘One has a duty to work for the improvement of another’s rational needs.’ If duty is fulfilled, this leads to the other’s perfection in virtue or at least in a process toward virtue. Stoics argue that once perfection or improvement in virtue becomes a duty, preoccupations change. We become receptive to the notion that we ought to be improving ourselves, others, and society. The effects of this harmless looking doctrine have been so striking that it has adopted a name: meliorism [betterment].

Meliorism is less a doctrine than an attitude that has fostered many doctrines. For the Stoics, the task of moral philosophy is to produce principles which guide conduct; to provide a doctrine of social commitment which asserts that we ought to be in society. This doctrine of social commitment has two typical meliorist characteristics. It incorporates, in the early Stoa, as an imperative the duty of perfection in virtue, and in the middle and later Stoa an imperative of duty to progress in virtue. The unexamined assumption here is that reciprocity ought to be done on the basis of duty alone and that reciprocity’s value lies in its social usefulness for the promotion of individual and collective virtue.

Such theory leads to Stoic reflections on reciprocity, happiness, and The Golden Rule which might seem startling given what has been suggested up to this point. What makes for a truly happy and good life is self-sufficiency. Epictetus claims that noting that happens to the wise can disturb their calm happiness:

What upset people is not things themselves but their judgements about things. For example, death is nothing dreadful [or else it would have appeared dreadful to Socrates], but instead the judgment about death that it is dreadful – that is what is dreadful. So when we are upset or distressed, let us never blame someone else but rather ourselves, that is our own judgements.  

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What happens to you can never make you unhappy rather it is the judgment on what happens to you that makes for happiness or unhappiness. Nothing can make you unhappy unless you allow it to do so. Happiness is entirely up to you. When are we happy? Happiness occurs when we arrive at the point where we never need things that are not in our power to control. 27 We ought to keep our wills in harmony with nature. 28 If we do so, we become alive to our rational nature and destiny in a society governed by reciprocity, reason, and duty.

Cicero tells us that a society for which all rational beings are intended will be found to exist among those who have become alive to their rational nature and destiny. This community was among the wise; specifically it was the society of the Stoic sage. The wise and virtuous value reciprocity and are friends because they all agree in their views of life and because they all love one another’s virtue. 29 Plutarch claims that every action of a wise man contributes to the well-being of every other wise man in that if a wise man only makes a rational movement with his finger, he does a service to all wise men throughout the world, is useful to deity as deity is to him. 30

Seneca cautiously mentions that since only a wise man knows how to love properly, true reciprocity and friendship exists only among sages. 31 Thus, only the wise man possesses the reciprocal art of making friends, for love is only won by love. 32 However, Cicero also reports the Stoic view that `we have been bound together and united by Nature [Reason] for civic association.’ 33 Thus, social principles are derived from a rational impulse implanted by Nature to form familial and friendly relationships. 34 Moreover, the reciprocal principle that determines such behavior is not different in kind from that which activates self-regarding actions.

If this is correctly the Stoic view, then the starting point of justice is oikeiosis, an attitude of attraction toward things which belong to oneself. 35 Since oikeiosis determines an animal’s relationship to its environment, but that to which it is primarily disposed is itself, it follows that the attraction to form any civic relationship has as its root an innate capacity to recognize things that belong to it-self. 36 If this is so, the development of friendships of reciprocity is the recognition that reciprocal community life and virtue are pre-eminently things which belong to human nature. Here the crucial question is - is this reciprocal disposition to family, friends, and social associations a duty-command ‘to do unto others as you would want done unto you?’ If the Stoics have a Golden Rule at all is it a good formulated positively, negatively, or both?

27 ibid., 12;14,26.
28 ibid., 4;6;13;30. M., 2.9.
29 Cicero, ND, 1.44.121. cf. Stobaeus, 2.184.
30 Plutarch, C.Not., 22.2; 33.2.
31 Seneca, Benef., 7.12.2; Ep., 81.11; 123.15; 9.5.
32 ibid., Ep., 9.5
33 Cicero, de Fin., 3.66.
34 de Off., 1.12.
35 SYF 1.197.
36 Diog. Laer., 7.85.
This is difficult question to answer with any certainty. However, according to the careful analysis of Sextus Empiricus, good is a concept of wider extension than virtue, but every good thing other than virtue or virtuous action has virtue as one of its parts. Whereas, virtue and virtuous action are wholly defined by ‘benefit’ benefit is intrinsic to but not exhaustive of such good things as a virtuous man and a friend. 37 This is because friendship exists only among the virtuous. 38 Stobaeus muddies the waters by reporting a more complex classification of goods. He opens the door to a much more diverse set of items and drops the essential connection between benefit, virtue/virtuous action, and goodness. He apparently does this to exhibit differences between goods in ways that are fully compatible with this principle. In any case, friends are classified as purely ‘instrumental goods.’

Of goods, some are final, others instrumental, and others are good.
In both respects, the prudent man and the friend are only instrumental goods. Joy cheerfulness, confidence, prudent walking about are only final goods. But all the virtues are instrumental and final goods. For they both generate happiness and they complete it, since they are its parts. 39

This means friends share with the virtues the property of generating happiness, but are not its actual constituents, as is the case with the virtues of joy, cheerfulness, and the like. If this is a correct reading of Stoic theory, then the acquisition of friends is purely instrumental. That is to say, friends are a means to happiness and its virtues, not an end in themselves.

If this is correct, the sages’ disposition to acquire friends is positive not negative. The Stoic wise man practices reciprocity and makes friends so that he can perfect his human nature and thereby attain happiness. This reading is suggested further by the claim that in the ideal world the state withers away because each Stoic sage is self-sufficient and his own authority. 40 All he possesses is the bond of friendship with other self-sufficient, self-authoritative wise men. Here all sages are friends to each other and it is only between them that reciprocity in its true sense exists. 41 In this communal life, in this ‘blessed’ pattern of social behavior, all distinctions based on sex, birth, nationality, and property, are dispensed with.

On this point, how can the need of society be reconciled with the sage’s freedom from wants? If the wise man is self-sufficient, how can another help him; why would he want to assist others? Seneca offers a series of answers chief among them:

…the wise man does not wish to be without friends, but still can be without friends. 42

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37 Sextus, Against the Prof. 11.22-26.
38 Diog. Laer., 7.124
39 Stobaeus, 2.7115-72.6
40 SVF 2.617.
41 ibid., 3.625.
42 Seneca, Ep., 9.5.
The question is not whether he can be, but whether he can be without loss of happiness. If the answer is negative, the wise man is not self-sufficient and happy; if in the affirmative, as Seneca suggests, a sage will bear the loss of a friend in calmness for he can have another in a reciprocal moment. If this is the case, friendship is hardly important at all for the self-sufficient wise man.

However, Seneca attempts to salvage what he can of Stoic reciprocity and friendship. It has its value in itself alone; every wise man must wish to find those like himself; the wise man needs a friend, not to have a nurse in sickness and a helper in trouble, but to have someone whom he can tend and assist, and for whom he can live and die. But even here friendship is self-referential. It is an object for the sage’s moral activity, however reciprocal it may be. Ultimately, friendship belongs to external goods and the wise man is largely indifferent to such goods.

In conclusion, unlike Aristotle, the Stoic sage does not even expect or need the reciprocity of friendship from the friend. Nor does friendship make wise man dependent. Nonetheless, he has the reciprocal duty to provide goods to friends for their welfare. Such is the absolute independence of the wise man [spoudaios] who sees duty to others as a rational obligation in the service of a virtuous self and society.

II
The Golden Rule: The Later Roman World
The Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists

1
The Neopythagoreans
Reciprocity and the Kinship of All Living Things

If there is a later Pythagorean and Neoplatonic definition of The Golden Rule it would read: ‘Do unto others what by God’s grace and love is done unto you.’

Historically, it might strike oddly that our study concludes, rather than opens, with a consideration of the Pythagorean-Platonic life, bios. This approach is undertaken to avoid the Truemmerfeld [obstacle course] of reconstructing the teachings of the historical Pythagoras and early Pythagoreanism. Since many of our sources about Pythagoras and the Pythagorean bios are late, and historically problematic, it is prudent to focus on what Greco-Roman writers said of the Pythagorean life, thus bracketing claims that any of these practices go back to Pythagoras himself. Here we follow the example of Porphyry, whose language shows unusual caution in

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43 *ibid.*, 109.13; 9.8; 10.12; 18.
an attempt to confine himself to what he may regard as certain. Porphyry writes of Pythagoras as follows:

What he said to his disciples no man can tell for certain, since they preserved such exceptional silence. However, the following facts in particular became universally known: first that he held the soul to be immortal, next that it migrates into other kinds of animals, further that past events repeat themselves in a cyclic process and nothing is new in an absolute sense, and finally that one must regard all living things as kindred \( \text{homogene} \). These are the beliefs which Pythagoras is said to have been the first to introduce to Greece.

The doctrine of the kinship of all living things is foundational to Pythagorean teaching. Without it the general view of the transmigrating of souls would not be possible. The basic claim is that the souls of humans and animals are of the same family \( \text{homogenos} \) which makes it possible for a singular soul to enter the bodies of humans, animals, and a bird. Closely connected to this doctrine is the teaching of abstinence from animal foods, eggs, and beans.

What we know at any rate is that the Pythagorean community was a kind of religious order whose rule of life was determined by the expectation of lives to come. In this sense to be a Pythagorean involved an \textit{askesis}, the practice of a special way of life. Here the abstinence from animal and some vegetable foods is a corollary to transmigration - the animal or vegetable you kill may be the dwelling place of a human soul or self. Behind this is the horror of spilt blood and the blood guilt associated with the dismemberment, boiling, roasting, and eating of Dionysus Zagreus by the Titans.

Out of Pythagorean myth and teachings a crucial questions arises: is the Pythagorean teaching of the kinship of all living things an example of reciprocity, an understanding of the other with the intention of welfare for others, with the consequence of such moral actions the cleansing of the moral agent? A provisional answer would be yes and no. The Golden Rule is applicable within the Pythagorean but not necessarily outside it. As Walter Burkert notes, when this view becomes the permanent mark of a group there appears the opposition between a common despicable world, and the special self-chosen life. It is a protest against the established \textit{polis}. Instead of the communities of family, tribe, and city there is now a self-chosen form of association.

\[\text{296-304.}\]

\[\text{op. cit.}\]

\[\text{DK fr. <14.8a>}\]

\[\text{op. cit.}\]

\[\text{p. 186-191.}\]

\[\text{8.37.5.}\]

\[\text{p.303.}\]
the Pythagorean possesses *themis*, customary law shared by civilized peoples. The other is a Cyclopes who eats animals. Thus, the other has no recognized human identity.

If the Pythagorean teachings of the kinship of all living things, and prohibitions against the eating of animal and some vegetable foods, go back to a belief in an inherited blood guilt, then the motives for believing and acting on these principles would be to expiate the penalty of an ancient grief. Here Plato quotes Pindar in the *Meno* that there is human responsibility for the slaying of Dionysus. 50 If this is so, the Pythagoreans maintained a notion of “original sin” which explains the universality of guilt feelings.

The Titan myth explained why the Pythagoreans thought themselves to both a god and a criminal. 51 They shared the view that life is trouble and punishment:

> Good are the troubles, but the pleasures are evil at all events;  
> for whatever has come in for punishment must be punished. 52

If reciprocity characterizes this elitist movement, then non-reciprocity does as well. An individual is motivated to choose the Pythagorean way out of self-interest alone. In doing so she purges her soul of blood-guilt, and over cyclical time purifies herself so that she becomes divine. Any reciprocal allegiance to life and community is purely instrumental. Reverence for life is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

The tradition of Pythagoras was associated with dietetic medicine which is a method of protecting health through a regulated way of life on the basis of individual decision [*diaita*]. Cynics were characterized similarly in a negative way. 53 Thus, until the close of antiquity Pythagoreanism remained a marginal movement. But as Burkert reminds us, a self-imposed life, *bios*, can become the basis for a new religious *polis* - in this case the neo-Platonic community. 54 Hence, Pythagorean teachings were brought back into the mainstream by later Platonists such as Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus. Indeed, by the third century CE we have not only Pythagoreans, but Essenes favorably characterized by Porphyry, as Pythagorean in life and customs. 55

### 2

#### The Neoplatonists

52 Iamblichus, *Vit. Pythag.*, 85.  
54 W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 304.  
**Reciprocity Divine**

Epicureans and Stoics have produced their own coherent and well-integrated account of reciprocity and its virtues in an attempt to clean up the state of incoherence in the use of evaluative language in Greco-Roman culture. Given the incommensurability of their ethical positions: either a reciprocity of desire or a reciprocity of duty, what ensues is further incoherence in interpretation of The Golden Rule. At the close of Roman antiquity another reading of reciprocity emerges in the Neoplatonists to muddy the waters further. On the basis of distinction made between state and community, a theology develops to support a new understanding of reciprocity. Reciprocity is divine.

Neoplatonists ignore Epicurean instrumentalism and Stoic meliorism in their definition of The Golden Rule. The source and activity of reciprocity is grounded in divine will, not human reason. What we encounter here is a novel return to the virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle with a ‘divine twist.’ To understand this return, we need to address changes in sociology of institutions between Classical Greece and Imperial Rome.

The later Pythagoreans and Platonists make a distinction between a state and society on the one hand and a community on the other. This distinction might appear vapid but bear with me. The political unity of the Roman Empire is clear and precise, and it includes all individuals however unequally. The state also includes institutions, laws, norms, folkways, associations, even folkways. At its widest, a state or society may be taken to include all or any dealing among individuals, whether these are direct or indirect, organized or unorganized, conscious or unconscious, cooperative or antagonistic. This generic use of the term is an organizing abstraction which covers all instances of the adjective ‘social.’ However, society maybe distinguished from a society. Society in this more precise meaning is a more promising candidate to explain later Pythagorean-Platonic usages.

A society is a collection of individuals united by certain relation or modes of reciprocity that mark them off from others who differ from them in behavior. There are things upon which they all agree. They all agree to approve of certain common acts and objects. A society, then, is constituted by our agreements, the state or society by our conflicts. Here we may observe continuity between Plato’s and Aristotle’s notion of cooperative and competitive virtues but a new twist is offered by Plotinus, Iamblichus, Augustine, and Proclus. This is the nostalgic desire that state and society might be disposable altogether; that a city of man would be succeeded by a city of god. To facilitate these ends members of a society withdraw from society.

Ginsberg’s argument is one that deserves to be taken seriously. But it depends very much on how a society is conceived. A society has in fact become a person and it features a great variety of salvific roles. Most importantly, here we find a curious monistic use, by which the purpose and

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objective of salvation are thought to qualify a society as a whole. It is this monistic usage which is the basis of neo-Platonic understandings of reciprocity and The Golden Rule.

These thinkers emphatically rejected the idea of obligatory participation in state or society. They accord to each individual the right to cultivate the soul, the virtues, and salvation within the protection of the terrestrial state and society, so long as the soul does not interfere with other souls. However, they also argue for obligatory participation in the life of the celestial community. Why is a society preferred to the state? In late antiquity, a society, a community has a much nicer ring to it. The late Roman state earned a bad reputation particularly in times of political and social upheaval. It also became with its civic deities irrelevant to salvation. Religious and theurgic enthusiasm accomplishes this.

Plotinus’ theology articulates our first conclusion about the uses of the notion of a noetic, intelligible society. It is a way of avoiding of talking about the state. The problems of a fallen, unredeemed soul appear to come from no particular location in society. It is a problem of intellect incapable achieving virtue in largely divine terms. It is not the problem of achieving virtue in principally human terms. This shift is signaled by the amount of effort Plotinus and his heirs dedicate to theology. The real theological question, in neo-Platonic terms, is whether the social order, imposed by the state and expressed in its laws, actually serves our needs. It does not. Thus, it is the aim of neo-Platonists like Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus to make a society into a single, complex organization. This is accomplished through a new metaphysics of the will.

Plotinus’ theological effort offers an understanding of the neo-Platonic conception of a theo-noetic society: a divine community grounded in the virtues of intellectual contemplation. He describes the One as will, and as love, of itself. 57 Significantly, divine grace is seen as the product of divine will, or ‘undiminished giving,’ which is the nature of divine activity. 58 Within the Intelligible world will, giving, and order imply one another. Thus, unaffected and unconcerned, the One wills reality as a spontaneous out-flowing [prohodos] of itself throughout the totality of Reality. Then at the levels of Intellect and Soul there is a turning back [epistrophe], wherein Soul and Intellect contemplate the One, and so receive form, order, and the good.

Plotinus is cautious when he addresses what is in all intelligible beings and makes them good? 59 He answers it is not sufficient to answer all humans are intelligible and thus good. It is, however, sufficient and necessary to claim that:

And if they also seek life and everlasting existence and activity, what they desire is not intellect insofar as it is intellect, but insofar as it is good and from the Good directed to the Good. 60

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57 En., VI.8.13.5ff; 15.1.
58 The source of this doctrine is Plato’s account in Timaeus 29e-30a of the divine motive for creation.
The form, order, and the goodness of life, existence, and activity are given a wider extension than merely intellect by Plotinus. Desire in all its diverse forms, are not only pre-intellectual in origin but divinely voluntaristic and original. He goes on to propose that by the means of the One [God], images of light, grace, and love exhibit how the One makes life, determinate essences, possible. What is novel is a subtle shift from a God, whose activity is purely one of Intellect, to a God who is both Intellect and Will. There is a divine light, both rational and volitional, that the One gives by an act of love and grace to all things. Here a revolution in Greek and Roman metaphysics begins. As Corrigan states:

This is a classic formulation of what will in later thought become the essence and act of existence distinction. Essence and the act of existence are distinct but not separated from one another, since together they constitute one movement of thought… from this simple understanding of the hyper intelligible significance of the most ordinary functions in nature [to take Plotinus’ examples in VI.7.17-42, breathing, existing, living, desiring, loving, giving light, being illuminated, etc.] the later essence-existence distinction in Medieval Arabic and Christian philosophers takes its origin and draws perhaps some of its cogency…”The Good [God] is gentle and kindly and gracious, present to anyone when anyone [tis] wishes” [V.5.12.33-35].

Plotinus also claims, following Plato, that virtue is the result of an activity of the soul which rises above the body. However, any consideration of virtue in Plotinus requires some discussion of the reciprocity of divine Providence. Providence helps him who helps himself by living according to divine law. For those who have made themselves good, this law provides a good life, here and hereafter and for the bad the reverse. Divine reciprocity, the justice of inevitable retribution [adrasteia], is a principle that operates in the least details of the organic world:

… leaf and bloom and fruit, and still more, men testify to the care of Providence.

Providence permeates the cosmos in varying degrees, as creatures varying in receptivity react to her. This giving is a kind of natura medicatrix, where even the evil done by free agents, like the wounds and the broken bones of an organism, may be healed by Providence.

This is where divine grace [and providence] comes into play. Iamblichus and Proclus argue that both exist under an appropriate mode on successive levels of reality. However, union between the divine and human only occurs through appropriate ritual actions. The rituals that invoke the gods are a voluntary bestowal of divine power. The human soul blessed by such power gains

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60 En., VI. 20.22-24.
61 Ibid., VI.7.35.30-34.
62 K. Corrigan, art. cit., 121-123.
63 En., III.2.8.
64 Ibid., II.2.13-14.
65 Ibid., II.2.5.
66 Proclus, PT, 1.19, p. 91.16-21.
67 Iamblichus, De Myst., 1.12; 1.14; 3.16-18.
salvation. This claim resulted in the claims by Iamblichus and his heirs that theurgy, not philosophy, leads to divine union. Hence, there is an emphasis in later neo-Platonism of the need for divine grace, combined with a new human receptiveness toward such grace. Without it the salvation of the soul is impossible. Here, we encounter for the first time the notion of a divine, non-reflective, selfless reciprocity. Here, for the first time, a reciprocal metaphysics of the will, rather than one of reason alone, emerges.

This sentiment is fleshed out by Sallustius, follower of Iamblichus, friend of the Emperor Julian, possibly consul in 363 CE, and author of the treatise *On the Gods and the World*. In chapter nine, he finds evidence of the existence of Providence in the order of the cosmos and in the details of human bodies, as well as in divination. The incorporeal Providence of the gods for bodies and souls, Sallustius tells us, does not cost them any effort. Here the Epicurean objection to the idea of Providence is met. Providence engages in a reciprocal divine giving that sustains the universe, bodies, and souls. Such giving is a form of grace or charity.

There is no word in the Greek or Latin of Aristotelians, Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics, or Cynics, for such grace and charity. When these terms appear in later Platonists such as Iamblichus, Sallustius, and Proclus, we are already within a late Roman rhythm and a new formulation of The Golden Rule.

**The Reciprocity and Patronage of the Sage**

One of the virtues or excellences of human reciprocity is one cannot do as he likes to the other. This is clear from our readings as diverse as those of Aristotle, Epicurus, Cicero, and Seneca. Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Sallustius, and Proclus refine this maxim, embedding it within the context of divine reciprocity. Before neo-Platonism there were social, political, and ethical considerations and constraints that precluded such an extravagance. The important question is why were such constraints loosened?

The genealogy of reciprocity cannot be addressed fully here, but the beginnings of the shift we begin to see in Plotinus, has its origins in Aristotle. In a stunning, indeed thundering statement, Aristotle advises us to reject the old rule of life that counseled humility, bidding man think in mortal terms, for man has within him a divine thing, the active intellect, and so far as he can live

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68 *ibid.*, 2.11.
on that level, he can live as though he were not mortal. 71 Epicurus did not make such a bold claim, but argued that through reflection on the truths of philosophy one could live “like a god among men.” 72 The Stoic Zeno of Citium went further still. The sage’s intellect was not merely in the image of God, it was a god, a portion of the divine substance in its active state. 73 Finally, to Pythagoras is attributed the claim that the soul is immortal and divine. 74 Plotinus and his heirs take this all in, following the suggestion of Socrates in the Theatetus – ‘be like unto God.’

Ordinary human living is not like that. Aristotle knew that no one can sustain the life of active intellect for more than very brief periods. 75 In the wake of such limits, however differently conceived, Aristotle and Epicurus found refuge in friendship. Only the Stoic, Pythagorean-Platonic sage still aimed to sustain intellect and claims to divinity perfectly, within his own rationally grounded self-reliance and within an ascetic community of friends. Only the Cynic hermit aimed at self-sufficiency within friendship but without need for a community of friends.

As hard as Aristotle tried to study reciprocity as it is, Epicureans, Stoics, Cynics, Pythagoreans, and Platonists of the Hellenistic-Roman period concentrated their attention on a portrait of reciprocity as it might be, represented by the ideal of the sapiens or sage. The attainment of moral perfection was independent both of natural endowment and of habituation; it depended solely on the exercise of reason. For Epicureans, passions were driven by superstitions and morbid judgements based on such superstitions. Eliminate superstition and disturbance will cease, leaving the mind in tranquility. For the Stoics, passions were merely errors in judgment or morbid disturbances resulting from errors of judgment. Correct the error and disturbance will cease, leaving the mind untouched by hope or fear. For later Pythagoreans and Platonists, a fallen soul polluted by guilt continually makes errors in judgment and habit. Purify the soul and disturbance will cease, leaving the mind hopeful of eventual divinization.

This psychology maintained itself throughout Greco-Roman antiquity because it was thought necessary to a moral system which aimed at combining reciprocal and reflexive intention and action with complete inward detachment. Unlike Socrates, Plato or even Aristotle, Epicureans, Stoics, and Pythagoreans made the claim that without philosophy, which requires intellect, there can be no goodness. 76 Such, in the broadest outline, were reciprocal relations within a psychology of friendship as articulated in the Greco-Roman philosophical schools. However, distinct the reciprocal theories of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle from those of Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics, Cynics, and later Pythagoreans and Platonists, all shared a common thread. That reciprocal intention forms the basis for virtuous actions. Without the former, the latter are impossible. Here no attempt is made to give an impression of a complex situation by

71 NE, 177b24-1178a2.
72 Ep., 3.135; cf. Sentences [Var.] 33; Lucretius, RN, 3.332.
73 SYF 1.146.
74 Porphyry, Vita Pythag., 19 = DK fr. <14.8a>
75 Met., 1072b14.
oversimplifying it. Reciprocal activities were undertaken. They were an accepted part of public life, but such actions were largely a kinship expression of social custom, and thus the practice of age-old familial and civic virtues, as well as philosophical teaching.

E.R. Dodds offers the insight that this was the case because in Greco-Roman antiquity the individual began to use the tradition rather than being used by it. 77 This is most obvious in Greek and Roman philosophy. Plato’s use of Homeric and Hesiodic myth and epic, Aristotle’s uses of Homer, Sophocles, and Plato; Epicurus’s use of Democritus; the Stoic uses of Heraclitus and Empedocles; and Pythagorean appropriation of Orphic myth are cases in point. But it is also so, in the words of Charles Kahn, that the basis for human reciprocity and friendship with Aristotle, is acceptance of the presence in each human being of a divine, detachable intellect – an active intellect [nous poietikos]. 78 What occurs with Aristotle Plotinus is the extension of an individual intellect to a divine collective one. The philosophical repercussions cannot be discussed here but that are extraordinary.

Historians have attempted to explain this shift in many ways. One is to suggest that among later Romans the progressive decay of traditional religious and civic traditions undermined the needs of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, tranquility, and apathy. This promoted the will for a new philanthropy. The anonymity and loneliness of life in the great new cities, where one was a cipher reinforced the need for a community of divine friends and helpers. What the individual did with the solitariness in this age was to form small private clubs devoted to the worship of individual gods, old and new, or to join philosophical schools dedicated to the common bond of reciprocal friendship. These foci replaced the inherited local community of the old closed society. Such formed the basis for a new notion of divine reciprocity in late antiquity – mere friendship [philia] is complemented by the cooperative virtue par excellence - philanthropy [philanthropia].

It could also be argued, as Dodds does, that the tide of Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian “rationalism” begins to ebb between the first century BCE and the second century CE. Many of the philosophical schools, save the Epicurean, began to take a new direction at this time. For example, new dualism appears in the middle Stoa. With Posidonius there is now a tension of opposites between sensible and intelligible fracturing the unified cosmos and human nature of the old Stoa. 79 At the same time an internal revolution within the Academy puts an end to the skeptical phase in the development of Platonism. It becomes a more speculative philosophy that culminates in the neo-Platonisms of Plotinus and his heirs. Significant as well is a revival of Pythagoreanism under Platonic auspices as a cult and way of life.

Pythagoras is presented as the inspired sage, a counterpart of Zoroaster, Ostanes, and Manes. What is taught in his name is a detachable theurgic, rather than rational self, which once

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77 E.R. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 236-269.
78 C. Kahn, art. cit, pp. 20-40.
activated allowed an escape from this world of darkness and penance to one of light and salvation. In such *katharsis* the soul becomes one with the divine. Here we enter the world of neo-Platonism and with its novel notions of divine reciprocity and friendship. Here reciprocity and friendship take on the aura of a divine unity [*henosis*] rather than a human constellation of kinship, familial, and civic relations and obligations. ⁸⁰

Consequently, the thoughts of men and women became increasingly preoccupied with the techniques of individual salvation through holy books, prophetic inspiration, and revelation; or by oracles, dreams, and waking visions. Others found salvation in ritual by initiation in esoteric *musteria*. In brief, we encounter the starting-point for a new and entirely different kind of *philosophia* and *religio*. Here the philosopher becomes in the words of Marcus Aurelius:

...a kind of priest and minister of the gods. ⁸¹

Or in the words of Justin Martyr:

The aim of Platonism is to see God face to face. ⁸²

Here the agent does not determine what motivates reciprocal action, higher authorities do - divinities and their interpreters - the philosopher-theurgist. ⁸³ Reciprocal activity can have beneficent, neutral, or negative consequences on the agent. Which of these works out, depends on the efficacy of a human agent’s knowledge of divine moral *praxis*.

As for the later Platonists their positions on reciprocity and friendship largely mirror those of Plato and Aristotle but with a fundamental shift in emphasis. First, the city-state [*polis*] is no longer the stage for reciprocity rather a meta-cosmic society of gods, daemons, and humans is. Secondly, a theory of divine reciprocity and friendship is articulated, based on a theory of divine grace, where souls are conceived as dependent upon a transcendent intelligence enjoying eternal contemplation of the Forms. However, even here a distinction is maintained between different orders of celestial and daemonic souls, where human souls are not consubstantial with those of hyper-cosmic gods, cosmic gods, and daemons. Thus reciprocity and friendship become divinely hierarchical in nature. Deities and daemons as patrons bestow a reciprocity of grace and charity upon their clients. ⁸⁴

Such patronage was not directed to members of society in general but to members of a specific religious-philosophical community. Porphyry of Tyre nicely illustrates the religious and cultural shifts occurring. He was interested in the habits of the Egyptian priesthood. Quoting one of its

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⁸¹ Med., 3.4.3.
members, Chaeremon, he noted how it had created a caste apart. Its members lived in highly regulated communities and chastised the impiety of those who traveled outside of Egypt, thereby exposing themselves to alien ways. However, these priests were also dedicated to philosophy and theology. This group becomes a model for Porphyry and Iamblichus for the neo-Platonic community, a pagan “church” that would receive the grace, light, and love of the gods.

It was under an Egyptian priestly pseudonym, Abammon, that Iamblichus of Apamea penned a kind of *summa theologica* wherein he sketches reciprocal relations between divinity and humanity. Iamblichus sees the divine and human worlds as coherent, inter-linked hierarchy. Moreover, such interaction is seen as a compound of thought and action, theology and theurgy, which included metaphysics, traditional cult, sacrifice, divination, and oracles. Moreover, he introduced a novel persona – the theurgist – who alone masters all of this sacred science from healing and rainmaking to a vision of the creator god. This figure alone receives divine knowledge and praxis of by the grace of the gods and administers it to an elite religious community endowed with piety, and characterized by sacredness and a sense of what is sacred, the hieratic arts.

Here we have the beginnings of a theurgical community with an acquired consciousness of a distinct identity with a capacity for self-explanation and self-defense: an *ecclesia neoplatonica* or Neoplatonic church. Moreover, by the mid-fourth century CE the Platonic philosopher and theurgist are indistinguishable. As the knower of divine wisdom and the doer of the hieratic arts, this figure becomes a supernatural extension of divine power (*dunamis*) and love (*eros*) in the universe. Thriving on the tenacious bond of divine friendship (*philia*) their knowledge and activity offered a mantel of divine patronage (*prostateia*) and the possibility of divine salvation (*sotereia*) to all who fell within their orbit. Indeed, the philosophers use and transfer of divine power to their clients rendered accessible the proprietary relationship with the gods thought lost because of the fall of the soul. Mortals are not immediately joined to the gods but require greater kinds of intermediaries ranging from the cosmic gods and their angels to heroes and sages.

Later Platonists such as Philostratus, Damascius, Marinus, Eunapius, Sozomen, and Zosimus present the lives of wise men and women who effectively brokered this patron-client relationship. We are told by these writers that Asclepiodorus and Heraiscus spent long periods of

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85 Porphyry, *de Abst.*, 4.6-8.
87 Iamblichus, *Abamonis resp.*, 4.2.184; 5.22.
88 Ibid., 5.15.219-220; 20. 228.
89 There are a variety of terms in Greek and Latin sources that suggest neo-Platonic religious self-definition: *threkrasia, eusebeia, nomos, hieros, hosios* and *hagios; religio, pietas, sacer, and sanctus.* cf. G. Fowden, *art. cit.*, p. 83.
91 For a study on this phenomenon see, E.V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus*, (Scholars Press, 1982).
their lives in temples while Damascius resided in a cave under a temple devoted to Cybele near Hierapolis. Each communed with the gods and goddesses who appeared at such places.

Venturing forth they became privileged agents and administrators of divine power, love, patronage, and salvation to a wider Roman world. Two women philosophers, Hypatia of Alexandria and Sosipatra of Pergamon were higher souls protected and guided by blessed daemons and heroes. Not only philosophers of high repute—Hypatia was the teacher of Synesius and the author of a famous treatise on numbers and Sosipatra was the instructor of countless students and wrote commentaries on the dialogues of Plato—they were practicing theurgists. Using a statue Hypatia telestically cured a man who fell in love with her while Sosipatra victim of a love-spell cast on her by Philometer had it reversed by Maximus, the pupil of Aedesius and teacher of the Emperor Julian. Other women like Asclepigenia and Anthusa of Cilicia joined men like Plutarch and Hermias to contact, fathom, and translate the divine presence and hallowings in statues to aristocratic clients in city, town, and country throughout the Empire. The inverted magnitudes of temples and statues resided in their souls. Consequently they were able to bring to séance and seminar their condensed solidarity with the divine world.

This map of divine love and power correlates with another symbolized by divine patronage and salvation. Both coalesce around Neoplatonic aesthetic patterns and later Roman cultural patterns. It is easy to be misled by the heritable traits of later Platonic metaphysics and Roman culture. So often presented as expressions of those who somnambulated in a utopian world many have lost view that this coalescence of aesthetic pattern and culture pattern functioned to enlist and register the participation of listeners (akroatēs) in the manifestation (autophania) of the gods in the physical world. A divine light (autophia) often appeared with the manifestation (autophania) of the deity. Sometimes the mediator, the philosopher-theurgist, would radiate divine light. While lecturing Proclus would project such light for he communicated with luminous apparitions of Hecate and saw the goddess herself. Not only gods appear; a parousia of nature appears, preceded by a whole choir of daemons, angels, and spirits. They are gracious, kind, and give beneficence to the person who evoked them as well to those whom the theurgist initiates into their mysteries.

Through symbols and tokens the god would recognize the theurgist as a legitimate practitioner, and the theurgist the god as a real god. Scattered throughout the universe through the kindness

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92 Zosimus, Epis., 5.46.3ff.
93 Sozomen, Hist., 9.8.
94 Ibid.
95 A portrait of this mood is nicely sketched by Augustine, Civ. dei, 5.23.235.28ff.
97 Oracles, fr. 286 (des Places).
98 Iamblichus, De Myst., 2.4. cf. 1.12; 2.5; 3.6.
99 Ibid., 2.4.7; Oracles, frs. 88; 175. (des Places).
100 Oracles., fr. 149 (des Places).
of the gods they work without our knowledge but they are known to the higher soul. Known to such a soul they were used to achieve union with the gods. Spoken or unspeakable, concealed within the statues of the gods, they assure the presence and intervention of the gods known only to the telestai. A sacred fire that shines without shape speaks to the theurgist:

For your sake, bodies have been attached to our autophanies (autoptois phasmasin).

The theurgist becomes a medium (docheus) for the presence of the divine in the world. Eunapius reports that Maximus assembled a large number of friends in the temple of Hecate and burned a grain of incense, reciting to himself the text of a hymn. The goddesses smiled, then laughed, and finally the torches she held burst into flames, into a blaze of light. Wise men and women, therefore, brought a divine presence into the world and the divine power embraced their human community, reintegrating each human soul with her divine source. Buildings, statues, natural objects, and language became the visible companions that crowded around the men and women of late antiquity. Pullulating with divine expressions of access and friendship they explain the ancient map of relations between deity and humanity in the age of the later Caesars.

In brief, late Roman women and men were convinced that gods, goddesses, daemons, and angels revealed their natures and names through those special men and women whose primordial sowing linked them eternally with the divine. A theurgic reciprocity enabled the imagination to project a structure of a clearly defined reality onto a known social world and to define personal relationships. Thus, the divine has its network; holy men and women tapped into it by building patronage networks of their own. As a result the theurgist was placed at the forefront of later Roman society as the fulcrum of a wide-ranging social patrocinium. As patrons divine men and women emerged to resolve the gulf between self and deity through an reciprocal therapy of proximity. The theurgist emerges as the leader of a patrona communis who sees the different levels of the self and the manifold levels between the self and god and resolves them.

Thus, for ancient Mediterranean men and women the pilgrimage of the soul to intellect and to deity is cast in terms of divine giving. Later Roman men and women tresured divine reciprocity. Theurgy transmuted psychological and ontological distance into the deep joy of proximity to self and to the gods. Here the reciprocity of the sage contributed to a network of interpersonal acts that carried the full over-tones of the later Roman cultural traits of love, power,

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101 Iamblichus, De Myst., 5.23; 2.11.
102 Proclus, ET., 223 (Dodds).
103 Proclus, In Tim., 1.273d.
104 Oracles, frs. 148; 173 (des Places).
105 Ibid., fr. 101 (des Places); cf. Iamblichus, De Myst., 5.23.
106 Psellus, 1.249 K-D.
107 Vit. Soph, 475 (Boiss).
108 On this concept in later Platonism see, A. Smith, Porphyry’s Place in Neoplatonism, (Brill, 1974), pp. 100-110.
sympathy, patronage and salvation.\textsuperscript{109} What accelerates at the close of antiquity is the practice of the theological virtues.

Aristotle’s reciprocal conditions for the possibility of happiness - that it had its origins in both personal and political friendship, and that such relationships find expression in friendships of self as-another self in relation to other selves, drop away to be replaced by the new constellation of divine reciprocal virtues anchored in charity and forgiveness. In considering the nature of friendship, Aristotle concluded that a good man cannot be the friend of a bad man. This is not surprising since the bond of friendship is a shared allegiance to justice. On the other hand, the virtue exhibited in forgiveness is charity, not merely justice. This signals a philosophical shift from concerns of how to achieve the virtuous society among men, to how to inherit a virtuous society from the gods.

Such a signal might suggest something significant. Kovelman notes that it is in the development new stylistic systems, that we encounter the replacement of old literatures and the creation of new ones. \textsuperscript{110} Following Kovelman’s insight, it is suggested that we cannot understand the Greco-Roman philosophical and theological conceptions of The Golden Rule unless we also comprehend the literary and social impulses that generated it. These are the generation of new stylistic systems and the creation of novel philosophical and religious communities. \textsuperscript{111}

In brief, in the Academy, Lyceum, Garden, and Stoa a cacophony of stylistic and cultural systems competed with each other and notions of reciprocity were refined philosophically and theologically. Beginning with Platonic dialogue and Aristotelian treatise, elenchus and narrative replaced older epic genres. Then, commentaries on dialogues and treatises were written replacing both dialogue and treatise. Next, public letters and biographies were penned. The stylistic

\textsuperscript{109} See, Proclus, \textit{In Tim.}, 3.280.19-21.
\textsuperscript{110} In the case of Hellenistic and Rabbinic Judaism see, A. Kovelman, \textit{op. cit.}, 101-135.
\textsuperscript{111} After the Platonic dialogue and the Aristotelian treatise, there emerged the public letter, which were the favorite genres of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and what followed were the commentary and biographical genres, preferred by later Aristotelian and Platonic philosophers. Here what we encounter is Kovelman’s theory of a stylistic synthesis of a seriocomic and learned academic literature. Following Kovelman, it is suggested with Platonic dialogue, Aristotelian treatise, and commentaries on both, what we are given are definitions of reciprocity proposed initially at the dialectical and dialogical levels. Such foundational definitions of The Golden Rule are revised in the public genres of literature that follow - the letter, biography, and hagiography. Here learned philosophical and theological literature becomes part of the public forum and community reflection and debate. Epicureans, Stoics, and Neoplatonists refine earlier definitions of reciprocity and their understandings of The Golden Rule, not only in a philosophical and theological context, but now also in a literary and social context. What results are novel understandings of what reciprocity is or ought to be. Reciprocity is now no longer a static virtue. It has become a dynamic one. There is now process in virtue. Here we enter a later Stoic, Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic world where the salvation of a soul is valued more than the happiness of a soul. For Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the early Stoics souls in a state of excellence or virtue are not in need of redemption.
synthesis that emerged at the close of Greco-Roman antiquity was a learned academic literature combined with a seriocomic one.

Finally, with the birth of the crowd and the use of popular literary genres there arose new teaching and scholarly communities. On platforms provided by seminar and séance men and women versed in Neoplatonic philosophy and religion thought out and practiced a new sociology of reciprocity based on divine charity and love. Reciprocity and The Golden Rule become an act of divine grace [charis] taken on by a soul for the sake of saving other souls. Consequently, the types of reciprocity proposed in the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman periods became [excluding the Epicurean] commensurable with one another. In nuce, negation and contradiction resulted in reconciliation – at the close of pagan antiquity a Neoplatonic consensus emerged where reciprocity and Golden Rule were reified as a virtue of reason.

Summary

I. What does the Golden Rule say?

In the Epicurean, Stoic, and Neoplatonic philosophies of the Greco-Roman period, The Golden Rule is formulated positively. It is formulated as a narrative with the neo-Platonists adding the ritual practice of theurgy to reciprocity. Narrative was chosen in the form of treatises, letters, and commentaries because the wise man [sophos] became the teacher of reciprocity. Theurgy was added because ritual became the medium of a new divine reciprocity. The semantic range of its language shares similarities with earlier Platonic and Aristotelian formulations but there is an extension as well. Stoics and neo-Platonists add theological and ritual dimensions to the formulation of The Golden Rule not seen previously. The Golden Rule emerges in attempts to extend reciprocity universally and it appears in association with the later Roman virtues of cosmopolitanism, philanthropy, grace, and, charity.

II. What does The Golden Rule mean?

A. Literature

The literary context for The Golden Rule is the treatise, letter, and commentary. If Stoicism and neo-Platonism are defined as philosophical religions, The Golden Rule finds expression in its scripture, the commentaries. Here attempts are made to tease out the origins and implications of reciprocity from interpretations of not only Homer and Hesiod, but also the Platonic dialogues, the Hermetic corpus, and the Chaldean Oracles. The former sources were taken as scripture by Stoics; the latter similarly by neo-Platonists. These literary contexts do not constrain The Golden Rule’s meaning. Rather it expands it. By embedding reciprocity in the particular setting of the giving and grace of divine Providence, The Golden Rule applies to include the entire cosmos, all humanity and even to the gods, the source of reciprocity.
B. Interpretation

The Golden Rule is significant in the interpretive traditions of Epicureans, Stoics, and later Platonists. Reciprocity receives a good deal of attention relative to other doctrines, practices, and precepts. Indeed, attempts are made in all these school traditions to link reciprocity to universal theories of community, state, and society. The Golden Rule undergoes a fundamental reorientation in the Greco-Roman period. What is advanced by Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists is the universal applicability of reciprocity. This is done at the expense the particularity of reciprocity espoused by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. These Greco-Roman interpretive traditions distinguish between reciprocity and retaliation with the tendency to downplay the role of retaliation in reciprocity. Here Stoics led the way. Given the value Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists afforded moderation in virtue, they taught constraint in reciprocity thereby obviating excessive or ridiculous inferences from The Golden Rule.

III. How does the Golden Rule work?

A. Social Consequence

Epicureans, Stoics, and later Platonists argue that The Golden Rule applies to all members of society. It applies uniformly across genders and social classes. It applies to people in general. It does not presuppose literacy or a certain level of education but the constituents of a philosophical school likely were literate and well educated. The author or authority behind The Golden Rule is the Epicurean, Stoic, and Pythagorean-Platonic sage. The Golden Rule applies at all times eternally.

B. Actor and Recipient

The actor and recipient of action include all members of the community. Reciprocity assumes that the actor is an autonomous moral agent whose rationality is the basis for evaluative judgements, whether judgments are based on desire [Epicureans], duty, [Stoics], or grace [neo-Platonists]. The ultimate prescriptive authority is the sage and school interpretive tradition. We have entered the age of a society of friends: the Garden, the Stoa, and the Academy. The actor does not determine how to be treated. The tradition supplies the content. For Stoics and neo-Platonists The Golden Rule applies to Deity, deities, daemons, and humans.

C. Reflexivity and Reciprocity

The Golden Rule for Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists includes reflexivity as a component of reciprocity. Epicureans and Stoics with their respective virtues of tranquility and apathy do not promote love as a rational virtue. It is a passion which gets in the way of the desires and duties of reciprocity. Platonists are less cautionary given the centrality of love [eros] in the ascent of the soul to the Forms, Intellect, and the One [God]. Here love as an act of divine will might all for the precept to ‘Love your neighbor as a divine self.’ The basic reference point for
reciprocity in all these traditions is inclusive of the actor and recipient of action, the self and the other. The Golden rule among Epicureans and Stoics does not require empathy. Empathy is a passion that impedes tranquility, apathy, and thus happiness. Later Platonists are more open to empathy as a component of reciprocity given the close connection between empathy and love. Sympathy rather than empathy would be a component of reciprocity – particularly for Stoics and later Platonists. For Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists there are no limits to human reciprocity. Epicureans think the gods indifferent to human affairs but Stoics and later Platonists claim that there are no limits to divine reciprocity.

D. Violence and Oppression

Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists do not sanction violence or oppression against others.

IV. How does the Golden Rule matter?

A. Systemic Significance

The Golden Rule is central in the school traditions studied. It anchors a constellation of ethical, political, and theological virtues together such as friendship, justice, charity, and, grace. Where appropriate, The Golden Rule works with other component philosophical and religious parts of each metaphysical system. Myths, beliefs, and rituals, such as divination with the Stoics and theurgy with the neo-Platonists, are utilized to produce coherence. The Golden’s rules prerequisites are many but principally include the rule of rule of reason in evaluative judgements and acceptance of the metaphysical, psychological, ethical, and political doctrines of the school tradition followed. A variety of other ethical teachings and religious practices depend on The Golden Rule. These include not only how the virtues inter-relate but for neo-Platonists there is also a divinely sanctioned cosmological reciprocity or sympathy. This explains the efficacy of theurgy.

Epicureans, Stoics, and later Platonists were systematic thinkers. Thus supersession of The Golden Rule by other precepts or values is almost impossible given the coherence and commensurability of reciprocity with other virtues, precepts, and values within specific philosophical systems. There were alternatives and challenges to The Golden Rule. The virtues of Skeptical apathy and Cynic self-reliance are intrinsically non-reciprocal and misanthropic. However, Skeptics and Cynics were neither numerous or influential in the Greco-Roman world. Thus their challenge to reciprocity and The Golden Rule was a minimal one.

B. Consequences of Failure and Success

The consequences of ignoring, disobeying, or failing to implement The Golden Rule resulted in unhappiness for Epicureans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists. The latter upped the ante by claiming the possibility of recurrent reincarnation and the loss of divine grace as punishment for such impiety. Social sanctions might follow as well in exile from divine ‘society.’ The benefits of fulfilling
The Golden Rule include the benefits of happiness, process in virtue, and the rewards [Epicureans excluded] of living according to the will of God. Such goods are assumed.

C. Exceptions

Epicureans, Stoics, and Neoplatonists do not justify flouting The Golden Rule. Nor is it justifiable to treat others as you do not want them to treat you. Exceptions to The Golden Rule are not permitted on principles of either justice or natural law. This reveals the status and reverence The Golden Rule achieved in the Hellenistic-Roman period among philosophers and theologians.

III

The Golden Rule: Ancient and Modern

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A Reciprocity of Will

`Do unto others as they would do unto you.’

The major category of care for others is reciprocity. The Classical, Hellenistic, and early Roman philosophical traditions mean by “others” what Aristotle calls an extension of the obligations of self to the other. Reciprocity is understood in terms of the political, social, and ethical obligations an individual has to a community. Moreover, the meaning of care for others is assessed in terms of reciprocal impact, action, intention, and motivation. Significantly, reciprocal intention and action are known and assessed by criteria established on the basis of rational choice. Hence, actor and recipient, as rational beings, make such determinations. There are contexts in which it is possible that reciprocal action for the welfare of others has a neutral or negative consequence on the actor. However, it is possible for action on behalf of others to have no beneficial consequence for the actor. This is because reciprocal action for others is undertaken on the premise that in acting for the welfare others, one is also acting for the welfare of oneself and society – be it city-state, kingdom, empire, or a community of friends. Moreover, it is assumed that intentionality defines the merit of reciprocal action, not consequences. Much will change.

The crucial difference between ancient concerns and motivational states on the one hand, and modern ones on the other, is that moderns have base reciprocal virtues on will not reason. All this is rather different from Aristotelians, Epicureans, and Stoics who see the virtues of reciprocity, friendship, love, and justice as the making of rational choices for a certain kind of life; of claiming that virtue is a rational choice which issues in right action.

Excellence of character and intelligence cannot be separated. This dynamic begins to shift in the later Roman period. Later Platonic definitions of reciprocity have much to do with divine will, and less to do with human reason. The basis of this shift is a neo-Platonic “turn” from
metaphysics of reason to metaphysics of the will. This change has significant importance for our study of The Golden Rule. Explanations for this shift are complex and cannot be addressed fully in this study. Nonetheless, it is suggested that emotivist reciprocity has its ancient philosophical origins in Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, with their emphasis of divine grace and philanthropy; and it has its modern philosophical origins in Hume and Kant, who radically truncated the role of reason in moral affairs.

**Reciprocity as an Ideology of Desire**

Modern Principles of Reciprocity then, rest primarily on Locke’s and Hume’s reduction of reciprocity to sentiments, and Kant’s distinction between the good will, the possession of which alone is both necessary and sufficient for moral worth, and what he took to be a distinct natural gift, that of knowing how to apply general rules to particular cases. Thus, the modern ‘principles of transcendental, utilitarian, and pragmatic reciprocity’ are a rebuttal of a Greco-Roman rhythm.

Briefly, Locke and Hume reduced reciprocity to sentiments, and in the shadow of Hume, Kant limited reciprocity to a categorical imperative, based on will-full duty. Kant’s categorical imperative finds consummation in the moral law, and eventually in Comte’s notion of altruism. An unselfish concern for the welfare of others motivated by willful virtues such as desire, charity, and forgiveness, and a motivational state with the goal of increasing another’s welfare, are products of a metaphysics of the will and an emotivist reciprocity that follows in its wake.

It is important to distinguish between ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ reciprocity for the former was far more rationally based than the latter. Modern reciprocity, whose method is intermittently transcendental and empirical and whose reality is found in the concept of the isolated individual, offers an evaluative language and ethics that are consistently willful, categorical, utilitarian, and eventually pragmatic in outcome. Moreover, in dealing with modern notions of reciprocity, we are dealing with an abstraction. As we shall see, there is no single person with whom we are actually reciprocal with. This inconsistency results from the fact that modern theories of reciprocity, transcendental and empirical, are the product of an ideology - liberalism. Liberal ideologies work from categorical, utilitarian, or pragmatic abstractions, such as fairness or reciprocity, to the need for volitional actions undertaken to better nominal entities, such as the People, the State, a Class, or a Gender.

Ideology is a vague and often abusive term. The description of a set of interrelated ideas as an ideology carries the aggressive implication that an ideology is a rationalization of various political interests. The term also carries with it the strong suggestion that the assertions of an ideology are false. This conception of ideology was first developed by Marx and Engels although

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it had its origins in the early Modern period in notions of idolatry – a generalized false consciousness. 113

Of what use is this theory? The value it had for Marx and Engels was it is a superb debunking tactic. Subtle arguments by philosophers and theologians were revealed as elaborate rationalizations of the social forms in which they lived. The majestic pronouncements of reason turned out to be no more than words which concealed the demands of an exploiting class. The usefulness of the term ideology, as an alternative to using the term doctrine, is also that ideology incorporates a reference to a social location thought either to have originated or at least sustained the set of ideas composing the doctrine. If liberalism is an ideology, then what is its social location? Marxists would nominate the bourgeoisie – all bourgeois are liberals or liberalism supports the interests of the bourgeois social class.

Each of these vague propositions is false due to an inability to define who actually constitutes the middle class. Many definitions have been offered but none pull off the trick of demonstrating an empirical connection between liberalism and the bourgeoisie for liberalism has over the centuries provoked both support and opposition from a wide variety of people. Given there is no consistent relation between social class and liberal doctrine, the sociological concept of ideology has been “salvaged” in two ways, neither satisfactory. The first is a retreat into Weber’s ideal types; the second is recourse to the technique of statistics. Both attempt to discover the correlation between being bourgeois and holding liberal positions. Those who reject these alternatives, create sociology of knowledge. On the principle that all doctrines have social circumstances connected to economic conditions, they conclude all thinking is ideological. This refurbished pragmatism which rests only the concept of ideology, only manages to destroy the usefulness of the concept.

I would like to suggest the notion of “activity” rather than “class” may better explain some of the features of an ideology. Historically, liberalism originated in a particular European cultural tradition and has characteristics of activities carried on within that tradition. It has been associated with the development of modern science and the politics of reform that emerged out of the Enlightenment periods. If this is valid, an ideology is a set of ideas whose primary coherence results not from their truth or consistency, as in science and philosophy, but from some external cause such as some mood or emotion. Ideologies also incorporate ideals, value-judgements, and instructions about correct behavior. The psychological mark of ideology is the presence of dogma, beliefs that have been fortified and surrounded by semantic barbed-wire. Although liberalism invites argument it is an understanding of the world of whose bias we are hardly aware. This is why many liberal opinions seem as obvious as to be unquestionable. If all this is plausible, then liberalism is an ideology.

113 D. Hawkes, op. cit., 21-32.
Reciprocity and Utility

What has all this to do with contemporary notions of reciprocity, one might ask? Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Marcus Aurelius asserted that society was prior to the individual, while Locke, Kant, Bentham, Mill, and Dewey claimed that society was an abstract fiction standing for a collection of individuals. Consequently, in liberalism politics is about humans in relationship with each other. There are only people and relations. Modern philosophers are tempted to reduce this duality further to a single concept – relations are more real than people. People die but social relations continue. What is left is merely an abstraction – Man and social relations.

Modern notions of reciprocity developed out of these insights and liberal thinkers had good reason to build a preference duality into their system right at the beginning. Locke states:

Pleasure and pain and that, which causes them, good and evil,
are the hinges on which passions turn. 114

Liberal Man is seen as a creature of desires and each desire creates a policy, a policy is determined by its end, reason working with our experience of the world supplies the means by which the end may be realized. The discovery of means is a difficult matter that requires the sifting of evidence and judgment. Thus reason poses problems to which we seek solutions.

The point of liberal individualism was the belief that wherever a policy existed, there must also be the desire of an individual to sustain it although paradoxically there are no individuals. Individuals are metaphorical always reducible to the desires of more than one individual. There is only Man or the People who desire. Thus Man desires a policy and such desire disposes men to co-operate with one another, for one of the principles of modern notions of reciprocity arising out of the logic of policies is that ends and means are linked by necessity. We cannot have the end without also willing the means.

Thus modern reciprocity is reduced to cooperation with others which means those desires that lead to conflict must be reduced or eliminated. Here some harmony-producing agency is needed. Instead of an external sovereign, such as Aristotle’s Intellect or Marcus Aurelius’ Logos, there is offered an internal harmonizer. It is called reason. Reason is one of the totems of liberalism and there are difficulties in determining just what modern notions of reason are and stand for. But in empiricism, utilitarianism, and pragmatism reason is an agency which asks and answers questions like: What do I want. By which kinds of behavior can I attain the greatest number of my ends? How can I attain them most efficiently with least danger to other ends which I also pursue? Here it is assumed that all behavior can be explained in terms of desiring policies, and that we are in a position to discover and rationalize the ends which arise in our striving after desire.

114 Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II.20.3.
Out of this arises the claim that reason primarily commands respect for other individuals as selves whose desires are as legitimate as one’s own. Locke regards this as creating ‘a natural duty’ of bearing reciprocal affection to one’s equals. What we have is a rule fitting into a technology which might be called the Art of Liberal Living. In order to get X, I must do – and as the rule develops in Hume, Bentham, and Mill – feel X towards others. The rule is psychological but it is claimed to be ethical to that extent that it derives from a moral [sentimental] recognition of other individuals. It is notable that in Locke’s Treatise this argument comes in the context of a discussion of natural equality; for it is only where equality reigns that people will treat you as you treat them.

It is a short leap from Locke’s reason to Hume’s notion of a rational mood which is a mood of caution and moderation. From such a mood, Bentham’s and Mill’s habits of calculation arise. Calculation is the presiding activity of the man who aware of conflicting desires wishes to satisfy his satisfaction. Part of the calculation is how to increase the goodwill of others. What we have here is a rule fitting into a technology which might be called the Art of Utilitarian Living. In order to get X, I must calculate X toward others. This leads the rational man to appreciate gratitude, accommodation to others, and a refusal to grab at benefits from which others are excluded. In short, we have is a thoroughly classical liberal-utilitarian Golden Rule: ‘Do unto others as they would do unto you.’ Solipsistic calculation is a prescription for the governance of desires.

This then is a general and simplified account of the ideology of liberal reciprocity as it developed in the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. These were [and are] times when a retreat into psychology also took place, and all social relations were regarded as artificial and utilitarian. Theories of reciprocity, of which The Golden Rule is a part, were secured in the most secure bastion of all – the human mind. All this finds its most general formulation in the Cartesian and Lockean distinctions between subject and object; between an inner and external world. Religious and moral authorities turned up as Protestant conceptions like conscience and inner light.

One might derive such ideology not from the behavior of a particular man or group but from an emotion, a desirable way of looking at things. If man be taken as a fundamentally desiring animal, morality is the criterion which distinguishes those desires which may be pursued from those which may not. The main problem involved out of the notion of man as a desiring animal is that of showing that anything distinctively moral can emerge from desires. This is a problem the Epicureans had as well but they did not have the two burdens to overcome: first the notion of the community as an abstraction; and secondly the abstraction that man was really Man.

The modern solution to this problem is to present morality as the conquest of solipsism. Morality is the recognition of the autonomous existence of other selves. The individual is not a desirer but

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115 Locke, Second Treatise on Civil Government, II.5.
part of a field of desires shared by others. The restraints that a desiring individual accepts in society are a means whereby he attains the satisfaction of his desires. Here the problem of the desiring animal is “solved” by proposing that if I want my desires satisfied, I must live in society, and follow its rules. Furthermore, my desires ought to be my neighbor’s desires. What we have is a modern liberal-utilitarian version of the Golden Rule: ‘The greatest good [desire] for the greatest number [of desires]. Social calculation is a prescription for the governance of desires.

**Reciprocity, Sympathy, and Utopian Desires**

If legitimate desiring is taken as the beginning of ethics, then duties admit of a more precise determination. As a result, the Golden Rule takes on a more precise definition as well. They key virtue introduced is sympathy. I legitimately desire to live healthily and without restraint and sympathetically admit this as a desire of my neighbors. What we have is another thoroughly liberal-utilitarian version of the Golden Rule: ‘I must treat their legitimate desires as I would have them treat mine.’ I have a duty not to threaten the lives of others, not to impair their health, not to obstruct the use of their own property.

A duty in these terms is a compulsory desire, rationally generated from the desires we naturally have. It has to be a desire, or the implication of a desire, because in terms of empirical psychology, only a desire can be a source of action. Furthermore, insofar as we are rational, we will want to do everything we ought to do, for our duties are in our interest and the interest of others. Here we have two possible outcomes of this internalization: one Lockean; the other Kantian. Locke would propose that a duty no longer arises from participation in a social relationship; it is internal but psychological. Kant would claim a duty arises from participation in a social relationship; it is internal but transcendental.

Both propose that the more morally people behave, the less need there is for society. The dream of a post-political condition, a withering away of the state, has a strong appeal for liberals [and Marxists]. Most liberal thinkers, including Locke, Hume, and Kant, dream of a post-political condition, liberty. The practice of the Golden Rule helps to establish such conditions.

The liberal concern with liberty is an attempt to construct a certain way of life. All moral virtues are associated with liberty – justice, independence, happiness, strength – but for empiricists and utilitarians liberty is instrumental to something else. It is a means to an end arising out of the liberal conception of man as a desiring, a satisfaction seeking animal. Desire in man moves towards its object and attaining it, experiences the pleasure of satisfaction. In a reductionist move, human behavior is seen as the pursuit of satisfactions. Problems of choice are solved by Bentham and Mill by a process of satisfaction management. We can be educated to desire socially approved objects with the only possible dispute, amounts of satisfaction.

This results in an exclusively psychological understanding of reciprocity. The Golden Rule: ‘Do unto others as you would have done unto you’ is reduced to desire, pleasure, pain, satisfaction,
and interest. Another outcome is despite the variety of men and women and pursuits they engage in, in reality everyone, Man, is doing the same thing or ought to do the same thing, pursuing satisfaction. They ought to be achieving one society which fits all. The only ethical problem left is the efficiency with which humans pursue a single objective. Behavior that does not fit in with the society the liberal is building is discarded or modified because it is inefficient and anti-social.

The most ambitious attempt to establish this model was pursued by the Utilitarians Bentham and the Mills. The hegemony of pleasure and pain is explicitly claimed with the object of desire relegated to a flatness wherein a pincushion is as good as poetry. Here we are far removed from even the Epicurean notion of the good life as constituted by a hierarchy of desires. Ignoring human variety, Bentham went on to develop his calculus of felicity based on pleasures and pains. The association of goodness results in the virtuous man and woman being merely a calculator of consequences. Happiness is simply what everybody wants.

The liberal view of reciprocity must be regarded not as inadequate or as unfruitful but simply as false, because of the superior logical status it accords to a constellation of desires called the self. Since J.S. Mill this is a fallacy called Psychologism: the doctrine that each individual can only be explained psychologically and all social institutions can be explained in terms of desiring individuals. This mistake is endemic in liberalism with its presence after Mill camouflaged by various sociological components - class, social norms, and the like.

Reciprocal activities, which cannot be explained by the desires of individuals, fall by the wayside. Here Plato’s and Aristotle’s reciprocity of justice; the Epicurean reciprocity of desire, the Stoic reciprocity of duty, and even the neo-Platonic reciprocity of grace, where we find the individual explained as one of the activities of virtue, is replaced by the liberal individual who explains that cooperation. No longer is there a moral excellence in rational cooperation which could not be found in the calculations of individual desires; cooperative moments when absorbed by reciprocal activity individuals perform self-sacrificing deeds, and in which they attain moral virtue by merging themselves in something greater such as justice, friendship, or an act of grace. Indeed, such views have been selected as the particular targets of attack.

What is attacked is the claim that moral excellences are founded on intellectual excellence. Aristotle may be helpful here. In Book Seven of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle analyzes three kinds of unhappiness: vice [*kakia*], brutality [*theriotes*], and incontinence [*akrasia*]. Vice is the failure of moderation; brutality is the lack of intelligence to know how to choose the good; and incontinence is something more – the lack of excellence or virtue. However, when the Golden Rule is a matter of habit or *hexis*, of acting intelligently, then it may be useful as a guide to conduct. Plato, Aristotle, and their heirs claimed that excellence of character was necessary for moral deliberation to be effective.

Thus when Odysseus and Philoctetes, Socrates and Euthrypho, Plato and Thrasyphus, Aristotle and Plato, or when Epicureans, Stoics, or later Platonists confront each other, it is the
outcome of human and divine reciprocity that is in the balance. Moreover, when Creon and Antigone contend, the life of clan and city are weighted against each other. Whenever Socrates and Euthrypho define piety, virtue and society are weighted against one another; whenever Aristotelians, Epicureans, Stoics, Sceptics, Cynics, and later Platonists define reciprocity, it is the individual in his or her role, representing his or her community that is at issue.

This is especially the case with reciprocity. What is needed is the habit of acting with foresight and intelligence. With this a person acquires phronesis, a natural perfecting of human nature. This is where reciprocity comes in to play. There are no general rules, no universal moral laws, no “principles” in ethics, except the one and single “ought” – to act intelligently in any individual situation – and realize human welfare or happiness [eudaimonia]. The purpose of the intelligent man or woman and hence the good man or woman, is never create the havoc that comes from acting on ideological principles, never to be so dull as to follow the right, ruat caelum, but rather to make a virtue out of every situation.

**Conclusion**

There are consequences of any “turn” from reason to will and from a reciprocity of virtue to a reciprocity of sentiments. What is lost is a Golden Rule grounded in rational choice and its virtues. Green in “Parsing Reciprocity” suggests as much. He employs modern volitional and utilitarian language in attempts to define the Golden Rule. He says: “…we can take the term ‘the Golden Rule’ to refer at least to a general statement that instructs us to treat others as we want, and would want, others to treat us.” 116 He also associates the Golden Rule with specific ideological policies within conflicting moral universes, such as “pro-life” and pro-choice,” “anti-slavery” and “pro-slavery issues.”

The triumph of volitional desire over virtue is pretty much complete. If MacIntyre is correct, a reading of Green’s definition of the Golden Rule, signals the triumph of a reciprocity of volition and desire over one of reason in accordance with excellence. The symptoms mentioned which result in the triumph of will over reason, modern over ancient theories of reciprocity, could be viewed positively. But such symptoms could also be viewed negatively. They could point forward to what would become, in MacIntyre’s words, the characteristic feature of the modern world:

So for Kant one can be both good and stupid, but for Aristotle stupidity of a certain kind precludes goodness...modern social practice and theory follows Kant rather than Aristotle at this point - not surprisingly. Hence, those characters so essential to the dramatic scripts of modernity, the expert who matches means to end in an evaluative neutral way and the moral agent who is anyone and everyone who is not actually mentally defective, have no genuine counterpart in Aristotle’s scheme or indeed within the classical tradition at all. It is indeed difficult to envisage the exaltation of bureaucratic expertise in

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any culture in which the connection between practical intelligence and moral values are firmly established. 117

The ancient philosophers were able to reject and explain the inadequate linguistic usage and practice of reciprocity in their day. A similar critique of contemporary emotivist theories of reciprocity is warranted but presently wanting. If such criticism is undertaken, we would see that when the Golden Rule has only volitional value, emotive utility, and ideological practicality, it is a useless and pointless rule as a guide for conduct. What is needed is a disassociation of the Golden Rule from its modern ideological association with the pursuit of desires, wants, and needs driven by a goal to create a liberal society.

If the stance we take on reciprocity frames the nature of human life, we have to decide which narrative form best captures human life and agency. If a human life is understood as an individual process through which physical and moral harms and dangers are faced with a greater or lesser measure of excellence, then individual virtues will find their place reciprocally. Each human life will depend on what are harm and danger, success and failure, maybe even progress and regress, in how our individual virtues unfold. What human life, perhaps, should not depend on, is simply what a society wants by a collective ordering of individual moods and desires.

We conclude with a problem in search of a resolution. The rational self differs from the emotivist self. The loss today of the virtuous self, exemplified epically by Homer, dramatically by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides dialogically by Plato, and finally didactically by Aristotle, Epicureans, Stoics, and later Platonists, has been replaced by an emotivist self who has no sense of honor and shame, or a commitment for the community apart from a prior emotivist commitment to the pursuit of desire. What moderns have also lost is the epic, tragic, philosophical, and theological character of reciprocity. In its place we have volition and her children: Lockean and Humean sentiments, Kantian duty, Bentham’s and Mill’s utility, Nietzsche’s will to power, and James’ pragmatism. Consequently, the possibility of choosing a virtuous self distinct from the limits of contemporary empirical, transcendental, utilitarian, and pragmatic social roles appears impossible. 118 Thus, whether it be Locke’s and Hume’s sentiments, Rousseau’s general will, Kant’s good will, Bentham’s and Mill’s willful desires, Nietzsche’s will to power, or Dewey’s pragmatic willfulness, when we enter into a reciprocity of volition rather than virtue, we court what Sophocles called “the trick of light-witted-desire.”

The Archaic Greek problem of *ate* might assist us in contextualizing this conundrum. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon ascribes three agents of *ate* - Zeus, moira, or fate, and the Erinyes who walk in darkness. Among the atai is will. *Ate* is not merely a punishment leading to physical disasters, but a deliberate deception which draws the victim on to fresh error, intellectual or moral, whereby he hastens his own ruin. Closely akin to this agent of *ate* are those irrational impulses or

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117 A. MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
passions warily condemned by Euripides and Plato. Here it was, Sophocles as Aristotle reminds us in the *Poetics*, who expressed the overwhelming sense of human helplessness in the face of the *ate* that waits on all human achievement, particularly in the aftermath of the triumph of will over reason:

> Hope goes fast and far: to many it carries comfort,  
> To many it is but the trick of light-witted desire –  
> Blind we walk, till the unseen flame has trapped our footsteps.  
> For old anonymous wisdom has left us a saying:  
> “Of mind that god leads to destruction.  
> The sign is this - that in the end  
> Its good is evil.”  
> Not long shall that mind evade destruction.  

Alternatives to the Golden Rule: Social Reciprocity and Altruism
in Early Archaic Greece

"Call your friend to a feast, but leave your enemy alone; and especially call him who
lives near you . . . . A bad neighbor is an evil, as much as a good one is a great advantage
. . . . Take fair measure from your neighbor and pay him back well, with the same
measure and better, if you can, so that when you need him afterward you may find him
there for you." Hesiod, Works and Days, 342-351 (Evelyn-White, modified)

". . . I know the art of loving him that loves me, hating my hater and foulmouthing him
with an ant's venom." Archilochus fr. 23 (West)

". . . But I do have one good skill, that's to repay whoever hurts me with a corresponding
ill." Archilochus fr. 126 (West)

"Then may the great wide bronze sky fall on me from above -- a terror to earthborn
human beings -- if I do not help those who love me, but vex and become a great pain to
my enemies." Theognis fr. 869-872 (Edmunds, modified)

"Zeus grant I may repay my friends . . . and even more my enemies. I'd feel then like a
god on earth, could I but get revenge before my appointed death-day comes." Theognis
fr. 337-40 (West, modified)

"Grant me that I have fortune from the blessed gods, and good repute from all men all the
time; may I be sweet to my friends, bitter to my foes, honoured on sight by the former,
and, for the latter, fearful to see." Solon fr. 13 (West, modified)
"That's what a man prays for: to produce good sons -- a household full of them, dutiful and attentive, so they can pay his enemy back with interest and match the respect their father shows his friend." Sophocles Antigone 641-44 (Fagles)

"The injustice of these men only caused me a moderate annoyance, as I considered it ordained that one should harm one's enemies and serve one's friends . . ." Lysias IX.20 (Lamb)

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All societies are based on some form of the principle of reciprocity; the word 'society' itself is an Anglicization of the Latin word *societas*, the abstract noun formed from the stem *socius*, or 'ally' -- the person who is reciprocally able and willing to show up, who can be counted on to take my interests as well as his own into account. In its very etymology, a society is formed on acts of mutual, responsive trust and generosity. I can count on my *socii*, and they can count on me in return. This is why we can as a species form stable communities that endure over a number of years.

As the quotations at the head of this chapter indicate, however, the ancient Greeks did not articulate the bonds of mutual trust and sociability that held their communities together in the form we know of as the Golden Rule. Not until Aristotle in the fourth century BCE and then, more fully, the Epicureans and the Stoics in the couple of generations after him, did the idea of a generalized, reciprocal altruism, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," even come into discussion as a possibility. Much more common -- in fact, pervasive in the culture -- was the expectation that the whole point of social engagement was to reward one's friends and take revenge on those who had done one wrong.

For the purposes of this conference, I think it would be of some interest to look closely not only at the various Greek philosophical articulations of altruism, as Professor Berchman has done, but also at the social practices that lay behind and informed the
expressions of both reciprocity and altruism found in the epic poetry of the earlier archaic era, at least insofar as the ancient extant literary evidence allows us to discern them, since these continued to shape basic Greek attitudes well into the later classical and Hellenistic eras. A literary description, even when it is the product of a traditional oral poetics, is not a transcript of social practices in the 'real world.' It gives us rather a composite picture whose working background assumptions its original audiences would have been expected to find reasonable in themselves, and whose problems would have been of interest to them. As the corpus of extant archaic and classical literature makes clear, in practice the ancient Greeks recognized the value of both reciprocity and altruism; they did not, however, use the Golden Rule to articulate the practice of these values. Their different ways of construing both reciprocity and altruism obliquely put into high relief some of the difficulties other cultures too might find in taking the Golden Rule seriously as a practical guide both in other times and in our own culture, in the here and now.

The Greek polis or city-state of the archaic and classical period (eighth through fourth centuries BCE) was a development from the late Dark Age warrior culture that followed upon the collapse of the Mycenaean world. Homer's epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, must have taken their final shape in approximately 750-700 BCE. Some controversy exists about whether a poet by the name of Homer brought the Iliad and Odyssey to their final form, or whether 'Homer' was rather a quasi-legendary stand-in for an ongoing oral tradition. Whatever the reality of Homer as a person, it is now generally accepted that the Homeric epics are neither an idealized fantasy picture of a world that never really existed nor a realistic representation of the world of the early city-state taking shape as the Iliad and the Odyssey assumed their final form. It is much more likely that the world they depicted reflected a general cultural background and some of the working customs and assumptions of the hundred-and-fifty-year period immediately prior to the creation of the archaic polis, that we call late Dark Age or early Iron Age Greece.\textsuperscript{iv}

The Homeric poems depict a stratified male warrior society organized roughly around regional clans, based on loose kinship ties. Their leadership was of the 'chief' or even occasionally what is sometimes called the 'big man' type.\textsuperscript{v} (The differences between
these two forms of pre-state organization is that the 'big man' must both earn his place of leadership and maintain it by continuing demonstration of his superiority in battle, in leadership skills, or in his ability to call in favors from those he has benefited in the past, whether these are his own followers or other leaders, that is, his peers. The 'chief,' on the other hand, represents a more developed form of social organization. Like Agamemnon or Hector in the *Iliad*, he has to some extent inherited a stable leadership structure. He must exhibit a basic competence to preserve his leadership role, but others in his group assume that the job is his, provided that he has not committed mistakes that put the group itself at risk. In both forms of tribal society of this type, there is no state, so no automatic institutional control of an authorized, legitimated violence. The chief or big man is expected to lead his men into battle successfully, and to allot the spoils at the end fairly, in a way that effectively honors the efforts of everyone. If more than one chief is involved (as in the *Iliad*), careful regard for an equitable distribution of war booty is also expected between leaders.

In such pre-state societies, reciprocity is the glue that maintains group cohesion, so it is of immense importance and often very precisely calibrated. Three different types of reciprocity at least bind together tribal societies similar to that described in the *Iliad* and the Odyssey. The most basic form Marshall Sahlins calls 'balanced reciprocity,' the principle that the Romans later gnomically represented with the tag *do ut des*, "I give so that you give," i.e., articulating a systematic quid pro quo. Many of the poetic excerpts at the beginning of this paper articulate the importance of balanced reciprocity in Greek culture generally: in order to remain friends, I am fair to you, you are fair to me; we keep careful track of the running balance of favors done between us. But also in play, especially in the archaic age, is a second form, a 'generalized reciprocity,' often exhibited by a chief or big man when he rewards his followers not because of the need for a specific repayment but in order to insure continuing loyalty, and sometimes precisely to demonstrate his own position of leadership and continuing ability to control the distribution of goods. The systematic exercise of generalized reciprocity, when widely practiced in a culture, can become very diffuse, so that eventually it creates expectations that if I do a good deed in the present, someone else will in the indefinite future repay me.
This can create over time a far-reaching net of reciprocity that in practice can begin to look like the operation of the Golden Rule: everybody flourishes when generosity reigns from the top down.\textsuperscript{viii} Danger to group cohesion comes, of course, when the third type, 'negative reciprocity,' prevails, and the normally expected returns for a favor done are denied. This is the situation that determines the major plot line of the \textit{Iliad}; at the beginning of the poem, Agamemnon's refusal to give the outstanding Greek warrior, Achilles, his due leads to Achilles' anger and consequent refusal to fight, so that the whole Greek cause at Troy is put at risk (1.122-244).

In a succinct description of the theory of pre-state patterns of reciprocity, Hans van Wees states, "(t)he more central to a culture reciprocity is, the greater its impact in shaping identity and defining status."\textsuperscript{ix} It is interesting to see how thoroughly both the Homeric poems instantiate this observation-- in effect, their plot lines explore ways in which traditional Greek patterns of reciprocity are anything but altruistic. Instead, they define and reinforce the power relations that exist among the various prominent warriors in the Trojan War in the \textit{Iliad}, and among the band of men trying to return home from the Trojan War with Odysseus in the \textit{Odyssey}. A second general observation is relevant here as well, before we turn to the poems themselves. Warriors must identify enemies and firmly oppose them; that is what they do. I put it out tentatively (this is not a topic whose issues I am in any sense expert in), that members of a society whose self-identity and status within the group was profoundly shaped around war-readiness and the need for loyal deployment against the enemy could not have thought about reciprocity and altruism in terms of the Golden Rule, at least as we articulate it. To begin with an obvious general point, thinking about others in terms of one's own feelings makes little sense in a culture in which to be an adult male means being part of one's tribal fighting force, doing one's duty, that is, subordinating one's own feelings, whatever they may be, to the need for group cohesion.\textsuperscript{x}

The two long epic poems of Homer flesh out what I have so far presented as rather abstract sociological observations; they allow us to see more concretely how and why
Greek culture did not use the Golden Rule as a basic ethical standard. In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the men who would later become Greek citizens, that is, members of a *polis*, are still organized along tribal and military lines. In the *Iliad*, Priam's Troy is a city under attack from Agamemnon's loosely organized band of Greek chieftains (*basileis*) and their followers. On the Greek side the strategists, Nestor and Odysseus, keep the Greek troops remembering the necessity for their loyalty to Agamemnon. They know that if they do not stay united, the ten-year effort will collapse, and even if they succeed in slinking home to Greece, they will find great difficulties there, because of their loss of status and the resentment against them incurred at home because of the lives lost of their fallen comrades. At Troy, army discipline must be maintained; when Thersites, an ugly, crippled, and loudmouthed commoner, complains in Book Two about Agamemnon's leadership, Odysseus ruthlessly bludgeons him about the head and shoulders with humiliating language, and the onlookers, noble and commoners alike, laugh merrily (2.211-277).

On the Trojan side too, Hector is crown prince and army leader, but it is clear that he owes his position to his competence and ability to maintain order at least as much as to his status as eldest son of Priam. He must fight off the doubts, suspicion, and anger both of his own seer, Poulydamas, and of his Lycian allies (12.223-250, 13.726-740, 765-773, 17.140-168), not to mention his ongoing need to remind his feckless brother Paris of his martial responsibilities (6.326-331; 13.768-773). When Hector finally goes out to fight Achilles, after Patroklos' death has driven Achilles back into the Greek fighting force, Hector knows that he will probably die -- as he tells his beloved wife Andromache earlier, on the walls of Troy in Book Six, "... I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting... for I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it: there will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish, and Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear..." (6.440-449). Hector knows that he must remain an effective warrior and war leader, or he must die in battle; no other option remains open to him.
The leader in such a society must lead; his followers, on the other hand, must follow. One basic theme of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the high cost of refusing loyalty and obedience to the leader, against the enemy and in the face of manifold perils. In the *Iliad*, Achilles' refusal to fight almost costs the Greeks their victory, and costs Achilles himself the loss of his dearest friend. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' men rebel on the return voyage home, and his home is invaded by young local aristocrats who dishonor his wife and threaten his son. The result is that only Odysseus himself survives to homecoming, and on doing so he takes bloodthirsty, comprehensive revenge on the suitors. Those who are in power exact loyalty and exert control over their inferiors. The justification for such social stratification into leaders and followers, aristocrats and commoners, is famously summed up by Sarpedon, the leader of the Lycians, talking to his second-in-command, Glaukos, in Book Twelve of the *Iliad*: "Glaukos, why is it you and I are honored before others/ with pride of place, the choice meats and the filled wine cups/ in Lykia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals,/ and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of Xanthos,/ good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for the planting of wheat?/. . . (I)t is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians/ to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle,/ so that a man of the close-armored Lykians may say of us:/ 'Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia,/ these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed/ and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength/ of valour in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians' " (12.310-321).

What possibility is there for a generalized altruism in such a culture, so alert to the necessity for social stratification, and to the obligations of obedience from one's inferiors and tit-for-tat reciprocity among one's peers? Does it exist at all -- the impulse to benefit others as human beings, without regard for inherited status obligations or the need at all times to assure appropriate reciprocal benefit for oneself? In the Homeric corpus, the space for this question is occupied by the figure of Achilles. Much of the tension of the *Iliad*’s plot is connected to the picture of this one superlatively gifted warrior and his struggle to negotiate the constraints of his culture, but also to escape their limitations. In Book One, Agamemnon has taken Achilles' beautiful war captive, Briseis, and has
dishonored him in doing so. As Achilles tries to explain to his uncomprehending comrades in Book Nine, no amount of reciprocity, balanced or generalized, from Agamemnon can make up the injury already done to him -- especially because he knows that if he returns to battle, his life will be demanded of him; his goddess mother has told him so (9.410-416). Because of the combination of these two things, the dishonor shown him by his commander-in-chief, and the certainty of his own death if he joins the battle, Achilles begins in Book Nine to question the whole warrior ethos described here: what is the point of obedience to one's warlord, or of a glorious death in battle? What is it all for? In asking these questions, Achilles also might be approaching what we would call an articulation of a form of the Golden Rule, that is, a more generalized altruism than that normally expressed in the world of the Homeric poems. Two passages in particular merit discussion in this context.

The first occurs in Book Twenty-One, where Achilles in his rage at Patroklos' death begins to slaughter everyone on the Trojan side he can find, including the unfortunate Lykaeon, a young half-brother of Hector. Lykaeon had just been home at Troy twelve days, after being captured earlier by Achilles and sold as a slave to Lemnos and then ransomed home to Priam (21.34-135). On Lykaeon's first day back in battle he sees Achilles approach, falls to his knees, and begs for mercy, but Achilles refuses it with the following words (21.99-113): "Poor fool, no longer speak to me of ransom, nor argue it/. . . Now there is not one who can escape death, if the gods send/ him against my hands/. . . So, friend, you die also. Why all this clamour about it?/ Patroklos also is dead, who was better by far than you are./ Do you not see what a man I am, how huge, how splendid/ and born of a great father, and the mother who bore me immortal?/ Yet even I have also my death and my strong destiny,/ and there shall be a dawn or an afternoon or a noontime/ when some man in the fighting will take the life from me also/ either with a spearcast or an arrow flown from the bowstring."

Achilles' rage in Book Twenty-One is not pretty, and his wholesale slaughter of the enemy becomes so disgusting that even the river Scamander revolts and rises up against him. But in his speech to Lykaeon we discern a curious form of empathetic reciprocity in
play as well. Achilles tells Lykaeon that death is coming to all of them. If one puts this sentiment together with the words of Sarpedon to Glaukos in Book Twelve, a curious paradox emerges: it is the enemy, after all, who gives the warrior a heroic death and therefore the glory that is the compensation for death and the justification for an exalted social status. The fact that Achilles killed Lykaeon is what gives Lykaeon a place in the poem; one could not be an eminent warrior and receive a warrior's enduring glory without enemies to fight, who will perhaps kill one. In one sense, to be killed by an outstanding warrior is, precisely, to receive what that warrior would wish for himself; thus, as Achilles articulates it to Lykaeon, the reciprocity entailed in a noble death in battle at points suggests an identification of self and other that is deeper than mere conventional reciprocity of either the balanced or generalized sort. It is difficult to construe it as altruism, however -- Achilles' speech to Lykaeon has to do rather with reciprocal dignity, and the respect extended to enemies, the men at whose hands one might die, playing the cultural game as it must be played.

The second way that the figure of Achilles indirectly develops in the *Iliad* the theme of an empathetic reciprocity that might approach the Golden Rule has given rise to genuine controversy among Homeric scholars. In Book Twenty-four, Achilles compulsively, day after day, drags Hector's body around the walls of Troy. Priam, Hector's aged father, is stirred up by the gods to drive a mule cart laden with gifts under cover of night to Achilles' tent and to beg for the body of his son, so that he can give it an honorable burial. When Priam kneels before Achilles and kisses the hand of the man who has murdered his son (24.506), Achilles remembers his own father Peleus alone in Phthia, and he joins Priam in grieving both for Peleus and for Patroklos, the dear friend Hector had killed. He gives Priam Hector's body back, carefully wrapped for burial, and also protects Priam from being taken for ransom by Agamemnon, urging him to eat, and then to sleep, in his own tent.

Are Achilles' actions in Book Twenty-Four a form of the unconditional altruism articulated in the Golden Rule? One set of scholars argues that in Book Twenty-Four, although Achilles is certainly moved by Priam's suffering, he is basically still engaged in
his status contest with Agamemnon. His generosity to the king of Troy, father of his fallen enemy, in this reading, is primarily undertaken to demonstrate his own refusal of ties of dependency, since Achilles is here engaging in precisely the generalized reciprocity that is the privilege of a chief, magnanimously distributing favors, favors that show his superior status and are the mark of his own power to give or deny gifts as he chooses, ignoring the claims of his putative commander-in-chief, Agamemnon. In Book Nine he has rejected the gifts that Agamemnon has tried to foist on him, to induce him to return to fighting; in Book Nineteen, he has returned, but makes it clear that he only does so to avenge Patroklos, and that he remains utterly indifferent to Agamemnon's gifts. In Book Twenty-Three, Achilles himself celebrates Patroklos' funeral games and in that context distributes gifts to the other Greek warlords, including even Agamemnon (23.890-894). One can speculate that in effect Achilles here becomes in fact if not in theory the leader of the Greek fighting force; he has triumphed over Agamemnon in the reciprocity game.

In this reading, when it is regarded as part of an elaborate early archaic sociology, Achilles' generosity to Priam in Book Twenty-Four is not so much a sign of empathetic altruism to an enemy as it is a continuing marker of his refusal of Agamemnon's leadership. Achilles is now beyond gifts, beyond reciprocity itself -- he only accepts Priam's gifts for form's sake, and to placate Patroklos' spirit (12.592-595): "Be not angry with me, Patroklos, if you discover,/ though you be in the house of Hades, that I gave back great Hektor/ to his loved father, for the ransom he gave me was not unworthy./ I will give you your share of the spoils, as much as is fitting." He hides Priam's presence from Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders because, as he tells Priam, Agamemnon would complicate the release of Priam with Hector's body back to Troy (24.650-655). Achilles is now outside Agamemnon's sphere of influence, and in this reading his generosity to Priam is an extreme expression of this fact, not a critique of the culture of generalized reciprocity per se. There is clearly something to this interpretation, especially because Achilles' heart has not entirely softened toward Priam, either, in Book Twenty-Four. He threatens the old man when he expresses eagerness to receive Hector's body (24.560-570), and he carefully does not let Priam see Hector's body as he loads it
himself in the ox-cart, for fear Priam's grief would make him lose his own self-control and violate Zeus' laws of guest-friendship, by abusing Priam although he is a guest in Achilles' own tent (24.581-586).

My inclination, however, is rather to privilege the moment of Achilles' identification with Priam, bound as they are in shared suffering and grief, and to regard the other elements of competitive reciprocity rather as a realistic social backdrop to this transcendent climax of the poem. In this second, alternative reading, the ethical heart of Book Twenty-Four is Achilles' sudden and empathetic acceptance of oneness with Priam, stirring in him "a passion of grieving for his own father" (24.501-8). Achilles goes on to tell Priam about the two urns that sit at Zeus' threshold that distribute blessings and ills to men. Human beings, he says, are never given only blessings; they are either given only evils, or a mixture of evils and goods (24.527-33). He tells Priam about his own father, Peleus: "... There was not/any generation of strong sons born to him in his great house/ but a single all-untimely child he had, and I give him/ no care as he grows old, since far from the land of my fathers/ I sit here in Troy, and bring nothing but sorrow to you and your children./ And you, old sir, we are told you prospered once . . . . But now the Uranian gods brought us, an affliction upon you,/ forever there is fighting about your city, and men killed./ But bear up, nor mourn endlessly in your heart, for there is not/ anything to be gained from grief for your son; you will never/ bring him back; sooner you must go through yet another sorrow" (24.538-551). Here, as in the passage from Book Twenty-One concerning Lykaeon, it is the universality of death, but also of suffering and loss, that makes men, even enemies, brothers; so Achilles will give Priam what his own father in Phthia will not receive -- his son's body back, for burial.

A large part of the *Iliad's* depth, I think, stems from a genuine doubleness of values that emerges in Book Twenty-Four. Both readings that we have explored can be sustained. Achilles does triumph in the reciprocity game, both in his refusal to accept the generalized reciprocity, the gifts and apology, offered by Agamemnon, and also in demonstrating his own ability to extend it, independently and on his own, to the king of Troy, his enemy. Just as certainly, in Book Twenty-Four Achilles existentially refuses to
buy into the elaborate web of self-interested reciprocity mandated by his culture and, because of the acknowledgment of his own heart's emotion, he extends compassion and something like the Golden Rule to Priam, as a sorrowing father who has lost his son.

If we had to fix on one question about this complex of sociological patterns that is of particular relevance to a conference on the Golden Rule, it might be this: at what point, if any, does reciprocity of the sort exhibited by a chieftain like Achilles to Priam blend into altruism of the sort embodied in the Golden Rule? Part of the controversy over the meaning of Book Twenty-Four comes down to differing scholarly opinions on this issue. Those scholars who see Achilles as basically still working within the boundaries of his culture's ethics would say that the Golden Rule itself in archaic Greek culture only emerges insofar as it is a logical but extremely sporadic extension of the generalized reciprocity model, and that it has to do only with evanescent moments, like that in which Achilles weeps with Priam. The scholars who, on the other hand, see the Iliad as testing and perhaps even implicitly critiquing the reciprocity rules of late Dark-Age and early Archaic culture, see a model for homonoia or a more profound fellow-feeling emerging at the climax of the poem, as it introduces ideas that will not perhaps be fully articulated until the time of Aristotle, three centuries later. These ideas about empathetic reciprocity to one's enemy, however, inchoate as they are, clearly also play their part in the role the Iliad later assumes as a basic expression of Greek cultural values.

The basic attitudes toward reciprocity that I've described in detail as those of the Homeric poems continued to shape the values of the developing Greek city-states of the later archaic, classical, and Hellenistic worlds. In the Greek popular morality of the later classical period, a philos or 'intimate' was either someone in your family or a friend so closely bound by multiple ties of reciprocity that you had stopped keeping track of who owed whom what: the Homeric models would be Achilles' relation with Patroclus, for instance, or Odysseus' with Penelope. It was also generally true, as the quotations at the head of this paper suggest, that reciprocity among Greek male citizens continued at times to exhibit the tensions that prevailed between Achilles and Agamemnon. As the Hesiod quotation at the very beginning of the paper indicates, the emphasis remained on a basic
usefulness to oneself underlying one's ties of \textit{philta}. If, as Aristotle famously put it in Book Nine of the Nichomachean Ethics (1166a30), 'a friend is another self' -- then, one's deep self-interest is engaged in the act of benefiting a \textit{philos}.$^{xvii}$

Since even in the \textit{poleis} of the classical period social services remained quite primitive by our standards, the need to reciprocate to one's friends was what assured that they in turn would be there for you -- a crucial factor to assure your well being, when there was no police force, fire department, social service agencies or welfare state. Similarly, feuds between powerful citizen-aristocrats continued, sometimes to toxic effect, right down into the world of the fourth-century Athenian orators. It was an important part of your arsenal as a citizen male not only that you return favors to friends, but that you reciprocate for injuries and insults both to yourself and to your friends. The military foundation of citizenship continued, I think, to be significant here; even in the classical period, your right to call yourself a citizen was assured by your acceptance into your father's tribe or fighting unit within the city, and your capacity vigorously to defend yourself in word as well as in deed continued to be an important index of your civic standing. Regularly in fourth-century Attic oratory, your pre-existing enmity against someone provided your explicit justification to the jury for bringing him to trial, even on an explicitly unrelated issue.$^{xviii}$

Roughly the same rules prevailed among most Greek \textit{poleis} or city-states as among individual citizens. Ties of \textit{xenia}, or reciprocity among guest-friends from other cities, could be of long-standing consequence: the archaic and classical history of Sparta shows how firmly Spartan leaders conceived of their politics as a continuing exercise in helping their aristocratic friends in other cities assume or maintain an oligarchic control over their own fellow citizens. Xenophon, the fourth-century Athenian historian, was an admirer of Spartan values and Spartan ways; nonetheless, he makes it clear that one of his great heroes, Agesilaos, obeyed the injunction to help one's friends and harm one's enemies even when the friend was committing an outrageous, criminal injustice.$^{xix}$ As Plutarch much later put it: "[Agesilaos] would not injure his enemies without just cause, but joined his friends even in their unjust practices. And whereas he was ashamed not to honour his
enemies when they did well, he could not bring himself to censure his friends when they did amiss, but actually prided himself on aiding them and sharing in their misdeeds. For he thought no aid disgraceful that was given to a friend" (Agesilaos 5.1).

It would take too long here to consider in detail the developments from this archaic pattern that took place in fifth-century Athens, but I want to end by noting that in Athens, the city that gave birth to philosophy, things began to change. I would put the first significant signs of change with Solon, the sixth-century Athenian poet and politician who contributed one of the quotations about helping friends and harming enemies at the head of this paper. Many of Solon's poems go beyond the reciprocity/retribution model, however, and articulate instead a loyalty to the city and its laws that would transcend the archaic notions of reciprocity that we have been contemplating here: "This lesson I desire to teach the Athenians:/ Lawlessness brings the city countless ills, while Lawfulness sets all in order as is due . . . /The commons I have granted privilege enough,/ not lessening their estate nor giving more;/ the influential, who were envied for their wealth,/ I have saved them from all mistreatment too./ I took my stand with strong shield covering both sides,/ allowing neither unjust dominance" (frr. 4-5, Lattimore). It was in Athens that loyalty to the city's laws and to a concern for the well-being of all one's fellow citizens began to be articulated -- to the point that ties of aristocratic xenia or guest-friendship were discouraged, and gifts between citizens were looked on with suspicion as signs of an attempt to exert a generalized reciprocity that meant one was trying to claim too much power over one's democratic fellow citizens and peers.xx

Athens' attempts to articulate a democratic citizen solidarity were not perfect illustrations of the Golden Rule, as any city oppressed by her fifth-century empire would testify.xxi They were, nonetheless, an important step toward the concept of a world where everyone, friend or foe, fellow citizen or foreigner, would receive some of the benefits of the ethical principle that we call the Golden Rule. As Pericles articulated it in Thucydides' Funeral Oration: "We make friends by doing good to others, not by receiving good from them. This makes our friendship all the more reliable, since we want to keep alive the gratitude of those who are in our debt by showing continued goodwill to them: whereas the
feelings of one who owes us something lack the same enthusiasm, since he knows that, when he repays our kindness, it will be more like paying back a debt than giving something spontaneously. We are unique in this. When we do kindnesses to others, we do not do them out of any calculations of profit or loss: we do them without afterthought, relying on our free liberality. Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece . . . " (Thucydides 2.40). As Prof. Berchman shows us, it is out of this city, and the philosophical education it provided, that a philosophical ethics emerged that made thinkable a genuine, universal altruism, extended to other human beings because they are human. But that is a longer, more complex story.

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i Socius is cognate to the Latin sequor, 'follow,' as in the English derivatives 'sequence,' or 'consequence' (Watkins 74); an 'ally' follows or gives allegiance to one's own männerbund, or Indo-European warrior band. Much of the misogyny of early Greek and Roman culture comes from the fact that in such a structure women were often perceived as something men in the warrior band exchanged among themselves; they were usually not seen as participants in the act of reciprocal exchange. Penelope's role in the Odyssey, though, shows us that in practice women could be accepted in positions of authority and (often as representatives for absent menfolk) actively participate in their culture's complex web of social exchange.


iii Reciprocity as calibrated vengeance is known as the lex talionis, popularly 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' found in the Code of Hammurabi, and in the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 21:23-27, Leviticus 24:18-20, Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

iv See Donlan (1998) 52-3, and (1999) 1-34. Articulations of our evidence for Greek ethical values appeared earliest in literature (especially Homeric epic, but also lyric poetry) rather than in what we could call religious contexts per se; the gods in Greek thinking enforced community social values but did not embody or expressly generate them.

v van Wees (1998) 42-44. See also Donlan (1999) 249-264 for a fuller analysis of structures of authority in the Homeric poems . One of the most important aspects of
suspense in the *Iliad* focuses on the conflict between the chief, Agamemnon, who has inherited his status, and the threat to group solidarity posed by the potential rival, Achilles, who is the superior warrior and leader and triumphs at the end (though at a terrible price), but also ultimately accepts Agamemnon's leadership.

vi See below, note 11.


viii See Herman (1998) 199-225 for the relevance of the Prisoner's Dilemma, and the superiority of the 'tit for two tats' model of social interaction. See also van Wees (1998) 22: "(t)he more diffuse forms of indirect reciprocity include all sorts of behavior inspired by the injunction to do as one would be done by." But see also below, pp. 9-12.

ix van Wees (1998) 30. The most extreme expression of this truth comes in a 'potlatch' culture, where generalized reciprocity becomes conspicuous consumption and a ruinous competitive sport (van Wees 31-32).

x The idea of distrust of emotions and the need for a rational, disciplined control over them continued well into the classical period. Plato's image in the *Phaedrus* (253-254) of the soul as a charioteer (reason) managing the reins that guide the two horses of moral sensibility (the disciplined white horse) and emotions/base appetites (the unruly, out-of-control black horse) is a vivid, although elaborated, illustration of the earlier principle.

xi Problems of the sort that, even in victory, will be experienced by Agamemnon and Odysseus on homecoming, as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Homer's *Odyssey*, Book Twenty-Four, make clear; see also Donlan (1998) 67-8.

xii All translations of the *Iliad* in this paper are those of Richmond Lattimore (1951); the line numbers are Lattimore's but also generally correspond to those of the Greek text.

xiii The group tensions are well analyzed in Donlan (1998) 58-67.

xiv Part of Achilles' pathos is that he will not die at the hands of a worthy opponent but be shot in the heel by Paris' arrow, a fact alluded to but not explicitly narrated as part of the Iliad (22.358-60).


Bercman [this volume] 1-2 note 5 and 22-28. Gill (1996) discusses a variety of scholarly arguments about what Aristotelean altruism means; he argues that "... other-concern intelligibly develops (though it does so in an ethical framework not centred on the egoism-altruism contrast" (347).

E.g., Aeschines, Against Timarchus 2; see Konstan (2006) 193-4 and notes 18 and 19.


The Mytileneans put it this way to the Spartans in 428, arguing that they were right to revolt from Athens' dominance: "In wartime they did their best to be on good terms with us because they were frightened of us; we, for the same reason, tried to keep on good terms with them in peace-time. . . . in our case fear was the bond, and it was more through terror than through friendship that we were held together in alliance" (Thucydides 3.12).

I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of Walter Donlan, who over many years helped me understand the themes developed here; he is much missed. His writings underlie every opinion I have on these issues, although he would argue with my articulation of some of them; see esp. Donlan (1999). Other fundamental works that form a general background to the ideas about reciprocity and altruism expressed here include Pearson (1962), Dover (1974), Herman (1987), Konstan (1997) and (2006), and Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford (1998). The articles in this last volume in particular have provided much of the stimulus for the current paper's arguments throughout.
Works Cited


The Golden Rule in Confucianism
Mark Csikszentmihalyi (final draft)

Theologians and scholars have often cited Chinese versions of the “Golden Rule” to make arguments about comparative religious ethics or the existence of universal moral rules. The existence of passages similar to Biblical formulations of the rule, however, does not mean that the Chinese examples form a cohesive set that served as a cardinal moral imperative. Different voices within the Confucian tradition have made different kinds of arguments about the moral reflectivity that is at the heart of the Golden Rule. The earliest Chinese expressions of Golden Rule-style injunctions existed somewhat uneasily within a system that otherwise emphasized acting out of a set of virtues. While post-Buddhist Confucians were better able to integrate the general principle of reflexivity into their moral system, they still had difficulty reconciling it with classical aspects of their tradition. A close examination of both early and late traditional writing on Golden Rule passages in the Confucian canon reveals that the scope of the application of the rule was often restricted, sometimes even to the point of being used as a metaphor for reflexivity in action rather than as a moral imperative.

The most commonly cited examples of the Golden Rule in China are from the Analects (Lunyu 論語), the work that is today most widely seen as representative of the thought of Confucius. Discussions of the Golden Rule’s formulations in the Analects usually have been explicitly framed as comparable to formulations in other cultures. Jesuit missionaries as early as Matteo Ricci (1551-1610) cited parallels between Chinese versions of the Golden Rule and formulations in the books of Matthew (7:12) and Luke (6:31) as evidence of relatively unpolluted link to an early shared “Natural Law.”¹ Later, the connection is also mentioned by Thomas Thornton, author of the eight-volume A history of China, from the earliest records, to the treaty with Great Britain published in 1844:

It may excite surprise, and probably incredulity, to state the golden rule of our Saviour, ‘Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you,’ which Mr. Locke designates as ‘the most unshaken rule of morality, and foundation of all social virtue,’ had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before.²

Whether the surprise is due to the parallel across cultures, or the fact that the Chinese version was earlier, is not specified by the author.

While writers like Ricci and Thornton emphasized similarities between China and Christendom, later writers were more intent on drawing contrasts between the two. In the nineteenth century, many were more concerned with the “negative formulation” of China’s “Silver Rule.” The Scottish Nonconformist missionary and translator James Legge compared the Golden and Silver Rules in this way:

The lesson of the gospel commands men to do what they feel to be right and good. It requires them to commence a course of such conduct, without regard to the conduct of others to themselves. The lesson of Confucius only forbids men to do what they feel to be wrong and hurtful.3

While Legge’s reading of the difference between the “positive” moral injunction “do unto others as you would that they should do unto you,” and the “negative” one that he translates “[do] not do to others as you would not wish done to yourself,” finds the positive formulation superior. Bracketing the question of the relevance of the formulation of the Golden Rule for now, it is worth noting that Legge’s condemnation of the negative formulation is not the subject of universal agreement. Robert E. Allinson argues that the “negative” formulation is superior:

If we take an illustration from modern history, the notion of making the world safe for democracy arises naturally from the background of the affirmative formulation, but would not be a natural deduction from the negative formulation. If I am to avoid harming another, it does not follow that I should attempt to impose a political system on him that I find desirable for myself.4

Historically, the question of negative or positive formulation is often tied to just such normative statements. Allinson lacks Legge’s missionary imperative, and as a result he reverses his predecessor’s valuation of the imposition of “positive” reforms on others.

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3 Legge, Ibid. Norman J. Girardot, in his study of Legge, points out that Legge originally judged Confucius as being inferior to Jesus in a number of areas, resulting in barriers to conversion: “it was the influence of the Master’s [i.e., Confucius’] unreligion that caused later generations of Chinese to respond so unfavorably to the ‘ardent religious feeling’ displayed by Evangelical Protestantism.” See Girardot, The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 60.

4 Robert E. Allinson, “The Golden Rule as the Core Value in Confucianism and Christianity: Ethical Similarities and Differences.” Asian Philosophy 2.2 (1992): 173-185, page 179. Allinson adds, pointedly, “It may be simply coincidental that the notion of being the moral policeman or the moral guardian of the world has arisen from the Christian West, but I do not think that it is an accident.”
Beyond the way that the terms “golden” and “silver” establish a hierarchy of value, the excessive concern with “Chinese” versus “Western” formulations obscures the fact that myriads of different formulations bear each of these labels. The latter category includes “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 6:31), “do unto others as an impartial rational observer would have you do unto them” (Marcus Singer), and often even “act so that I can also will my maxim to become a universal law” (Immanuel Kant). This chapter looks carefully at four early Chinese formulations of the Golden Rule. While the analytic focus in many previous studies of the Golden Rule in Confucianism has been on the negative formulations of the Analects, a close look at other early texts shows that positive formulations also existed in China, and that the use of positive and negative formulations somewhat interchangeably implies that the earliest applications of the Golden Rule in China were perhaps not as literal as contemporary philosophers are wont to read them.

I. What Does the Golden Rule Say?

The core of Golden Rule, to borrow William Green’s minimal definition, is “a general statement that instructs us to treat others as we want, and would want, others to treat us.” Minimally, the Golden Rule requires a type of reflexivity to be applied by the agent of an action with respect to another person, bringing the agent into the picture, and implicitly drawing an analogy between the agent and the other person. Strictly speaking, the Golden Rule does not tell us what we can or should do, but rather provides a standard for comparing two courses of action, based on the desires of the other person. Further, for the purpose of the following discussion, I would like to pay particular attention to the continuum of metaphorical to concrete invocations of the Golden Rule. A metaphorical invocation is one that uses the Golden Rule as a cultural referent to illustrate other instances of reflexivity. A concrete invocation is one that actually contains an imperative that the Golden Rule should guide actions. In China, as it turns out, at least half the canonical invocations of the Golden Rule in China are of the metaphorical variety.

The two Analects passages that mention the Golden Rule are usually numbered 12.2 and 15.24, and connect the core notion of reversibility to the concepts of benevolence (ren 仁) and reciprocity (shu 恕), respectively. Both Analects passages say that a person’s desires may serve as a guide for how to treat others, but are phrased in such a way as to emphasize the non-performance of actions that one does not oneself desire: “do not impose upon others those things that you yourself do not desire.” In Analects 12.2, the injunction is part of a description of benevolence:

仲弓問仁。子曰：「出門如見大賓，使民如承大祭。己所不欲，勿施於人。在邦無怨，在家無怨。」仲弓曰：「雍雖不敏，請事斯語矣！」

Zhonggong asked about benevolence.
The Master [i.e., Confucius] said:
“Although you have left your home, still behave as if you are receiving important guests. Although you are delegating commoners, still behave as if you
are undertaking great sacrifices. Do not impose upon others those things that you
yourself do not desire. If in your state you generate no resentment, then in your clan
you generate no resentment.”
Zhonggong said:
“Although I am not clever, I will attempt to put these words into practice!”

Here Confucius tells his disciple Zhonggong 仲弓 to treat people respectfully even if
they are outside his kinship group or social class, to use his own desires as guide for how
to treat others, and that resentment created elsewhere can follow you home. As many
commentators have pointed out, this is not the general definition of benevolence. In fact,
this dialog is only one of six in the Analects that begins with a disciple asking about
benevolence. Of these six, only this one mentions reflexivity in any form. More generally,
benevolence itself is mentioned in over 50 passages in the Analects, and, as we shall see
below, later Confucians argued that the Master’s particular answer in 12.2 was geared to
the particular case of the disciple Zhonggong.6

In this light, it is interesting that the second instance in the Analects does not
contain a reference to benevolence. Analects 15.24 provides the other occurrence of the
Golden Rule:

子貢問曰：「有一言而可以終身行之者乎」子曰：「其『恕』乎！己所不欲，
勿施於人。

5 Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, Lunyu yihuzhu 論語譯注 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1984), pp. 123-
124.
6 For example, the influential Song dynasty commentator Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200)
compares Confucius’ answer in Analects 12.1 to the one in 12.2, and argues that the two
answers to the same question are a matter of something like a Buddhist “expediency”
(fangbian 方便). He uses the dual principle of yin and yang (as expressed by their
counterpart hexagrams in the Book of Changes, kun 坤 and qian 乾) to reconcile the
different answers into a single overarching scheme: 克己復禮，乾道也；主敬行恕，坤
道也。顏、冉之學，其高下淺深，於此可見。然學者誠能從事於敬恕之間而有得焉，
亦將無己之可克矣 “To ‘observe the rites by overcoming the self’ [i.e., the answer in
12.1] is the qian Way. To ‘emphasize reverence and act with reciprocity’ [i.e., the answer
in 12.2] is the kun Way. The types of learning that Yan and Ran [i.e., the disciples Yan
Yuan and Zhonggong] were engaged in, their strengths and weaknesses, talents and
deficiencies, can all be seen from this comparison. Thus students can sincerely attend to
affairs in reverence and reciprocity and benefit from it, and also will end up without a self
132-133.
Zigong asked:

‘Is there a single doctrine that one may put into practice throughout one’s life?’

The Master [i.e., Confucius] said:

‘It is ‘reciprocity.’ Do not impose upon others those things that you yourself do not desire.’”

This passage would appear to place the concept of reciprocity and the Golden Rule at the center of Confucius’ teachings. However, numerous interpreters have argued there are good reasons to be skeptical about either the claim that reciprocity is so central, or the original nature of the passage itself. In particular, Bryan Van Norden’s recent work *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* argues that this passage was a later interpolation, and further that it is inconsistent with the virtue ethics approach of the *Analects* in general. 8 E. Bruce Brooks goes even further to dismiss both *Analects* passages as interpolations, saying the Golden Rule is “notable as not a saying of Confucius. Its laterality (there are no sacred or other verbal sanctions), and its basis in desire (the appeal is exclusively to feelings; compare 5:11), imply an origin outside the Analects itself. . .” 9 These reactions underscore the extent to which the concrete invocation of Golden Rule does not fit easily into the modified “Virtue Ethics” of early Confucianism. As Van Norden notes, the measure of a good action is generally whether it is an expression of the relevant virtue on the part of the actor, and this does not take into account the desires of the other person. Indeed, an action that expresses the actor’s ritual propriety would be determined by the social role of the other person involved, and not, as Brooks points out, their desires. Yet this raises a question which is more significant comparative issue than the issue of formulation. If the Golden Rule in the *Analects* is not to be read as a concrete, universal moral imperative, are there other ways to read it?

Metaphorical readings of the Golden Rule are clearly intended if we move beyond the *Analects* to the early Confucian text *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記). The *Record of Rites* contains rather different versions of the Golden Rule, including a positive formulation. From the perspective of the entire history of Confucianism, these instances are very important, since they come from the two chapters of the *Record of Rites* that are singled out by Zhu Xi in the Song dynasty to become part of the canonical “Four Books” (sishu 四書) that supplanted the “Five Classics” (wujing 五經). The titles of these two chapters are commonly rendered into English as the “Doctrine of the Mean” (*Zhongyong* 中庸) and “Great Learning” (*Daxue* 大學), and originated as chapters 31 and 42 of the *Record of Rites*, respectively. In the twelfth century, however, Zhu Xi identified the former as the work of Confucius’ disciple Zengzi 曾子 and Zengzi’s disciples, and the latter as the

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8 See chapter two of his *Virtue Ethics* (New York: Cambridge, 2007).
work of Confucius’ disciple Zisi 子思. Zhu Xi also placed these two works on the same footing as the *Analects*. The “Doctrine of the Mean” is explicit about identifying its formulation of the Golden Rule not as a saying of Confucius, but as commentary on one of his sayings:

子曰：「道不遠人。人之為道而遠人，不可以為道。」
《詩》云：『伐柯伐柯，其則不遠。』執柯以伐柯，睨而視之，猶以為遠。故君子以人治人，改而止。忠恕違道不遠，施諸己而不願，亦勿施於人。

The Master said:
“The Way is accessible to people. If a person acts a certain way, but it is inaccessible to others, then it cannot be the Way.”

The *Book of Odes* says: ‘When carving an axe-handle, its design is accessible.’ You grasp an axe’s handle when you carve another axe-handle, but if you only see it out of the corner of your eye, it is as if it is inaccessible.”

So when a Gentleman governs people, once he reforms them then he stops. Loyalty and reciprocity ensure access to the Way. Do no impose on others what you do not want done to yourself.\(^\text{10}\)

This version of the Golden Rule differs from the *Analects* passages in several ways. First, it is clearly intended as advice to a ruler. In light of the passage from the *Book of Odes*, the ruler’s perfected state is the handle of the axe that is being wielded to carve the unfinished blocks of the subjects’ raw states. Because the axe being wielded provides a blueprint for the axe being fashioned, the reversibility of the process is analogized to a ruler’s examination of their own nature as a model for their subjects. The second difference arises from its use as an illustration of a principle that is slightly different from the Golden Rule in the abstract. This passage is usually explained in terms of the ruler’s bringing people into conformity with their natures (xing 形), but going no further. It is not defining moral action in general, but is used to explain how far a ruler goes in transforming his subjects.

As such, it appears that this citation of the Golden Rule is to invoke a general reflexivity, but not specifically an injunction against doing to others as one does not oneself desire. Instead, it is much more specific. It concerns not shaping one’s subordinates in ways that embellish the blueprint of the exemplar that one is using.

Another passage, from the “Great Learning,” that is often cited as a Chinese formulation of the Golden Rule is similar to the previous one in several ways:

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\(^\text{10}\) *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983) 31.881.
Yao and Shun led the people of the world through benevolence, and the common people followed their example. Jie and Zhou led the people of the world through violence, and the common people followed their example. It is when their commands ran counter to what they enjoyed that the people did not follow them. That is why the Gentleman possesses something himself and only then seeks it in others. He does not possess it himself, only then does he condemn it in others. There has never yet been anyone who lacked their own store of reciprocity, yet was able to convey it to others.  

As with the passage in the “Doctrine of the Mean” this “Great Learning” passage is really more about the way in which the ruler inculcates values in his subjects than about moral action in general. It differs from the usual reading of Golden Rule passages in the Analects in that it is not a universal moral principle, it only applies to the ruler’s ability to morally transform the population of the state. That process requires a comparison of the ruler’s own qualities to those he seeks to inculcate in the people. Significantly, there is both a positive and a negative aspect of this reflexive action. But its close relation to the “Doctrine of the Mean” passage implies that while the formulation is not the same as in the Analects, the positive and negative formulation may have been seen as mutually implying each other.

In all of these occurrences, reflexivity that is key to the Golden Rule in early Confucian classics. While it is impossible to say whether Analects 15.24 is an interpolation, the arguments for its inconsistency with the moral system of the text as a whole say quite a bit about how well it fits with the Confucian system as a whole. The other instances apply the reflexive principle in a particular context. In Analects 12.2 the principle is applied by a person who performs ritual, and it allows that person to treat people outside his affiliation group in the same way that the person treats people inside.

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11 Liji zhengyi 42.986.
12 This passage, perhaps written by Zisi, is similar in many respects to one attributed to his student Mengzi 孟子 (fl. 4th century B.C.E.) The latter reads: “桀紂之失天下也，失其民也。失其民者，失其心也。得天下有道：得其民斯得天下矣。得其民有道，得其心斯得民矣。得其心有道：所欲，與之聚之；所惡，勿施爾也。民之歸仁也，猶水之就下，獸之走壙也。。。” “The reason that Jie and Zhou lost the people of the world is that they lost the common people. The reason that they lost the common people was that they lost their hearts and minds. There is a way of gaining the people of the world: what you desire you give to them and so collect them, what you hate you do not impose on them. The common people return to benevolence like water flowing downward, or as beasts flee to open spaces...” See Mengzi 4A9
that group. In the “Doctrine of the Mean” and “Great Learning” passages, the principle is applied by a ruler in the context of the transformation of the ruler’s subjects by the power of charismatic authority. In these last three cases, the application of the Golden Rule is not universal, but is instead limited to particular interactions, and the rule seems to be invoked at least partly as a metaphor to talk about more limited moral imperatives.

II. What Does the Golden Rule Mean?

Early Confucian instances of the Golden Rule include what seem to be full-fledged moral imperatives (e.g., *Analects* 15.24) as well as invocations of the imperative as a metaphor for reflexive comparison of self and other (e.g., “Doctrine of the Mean”). Attention has primarily been paid to the question of whether the “negative formulation” means something different than the positive formulation. In the end, were the Chinese formulations of the Golden Rule interpreted to mean something different from Western formulations?

Out of deference to the exalted position of the controversy about the relative merits of the positive and negative formulations, it is necessary to begin by pointing out the ultimate similarity of these two versions of the Golden Rule. As demonstrated in the previous section, the positive statement of the Golden Rule in the “Great Learning” plays a functionally similar role to the negative one in the “Doctrine of the Mean.” Not all Chinese formulations of the Golden Rule are negative, and indeed the negative and positive seem to imply one another in the minds of those writers. Heiner Roetz makes this argument in his *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*: “the ethically essential abstraction represented by the Golden Rule, the establishment of a reciprocal relation between the self and the other is also established by the negative version.”

Second, as philosopher David S. Nivison has argued:

> If, having promised to appear this evening, I had not done so, I still would have done something, namely breaking a promise. Not doing something to another is always, under another description, doing something to that person, and conversely.

Indeed, the conflict between the “golden” and “silver” rules seems to largely disappear once the need to assert the superiority of one system is put aside.

The specific implications of these early texts are worked out by later writers in different ways. In most readings of the *Analects*, the Golden Rule is associated with the virtue of benevolence, and indeed later writers try to work out what the implications of the rule are in the context of interpersonal interactions. Generally, benevolence was seen as rooted in natural feelings of compassion (literally, sharing another’s suffering), and feelings that were extended through moral self-cultivation to reach all other persons.

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In the metaphorical readings of the “Doctrine of the Mean” and “Great Learning,” the Golden Rule is used as a guide for more specific actions that feature an aspect of the reflexivity that it embodies. The Song Confucian Zhu Xi’s comment to the “Great Learning” passage explored above is a case in point. Zhu connects it to a subsequent passage about the ruler’s ability to unify the country:

有善於己,然後可以責人之善;無惡於己,然後可以正人之惡。皆推己以及人，所謂恕也，不如是，則所令反其所好，而民不從矣。

Only when one has a good point may one charge others with that good point, only when one lacks a fault may one correct that fault in another. This is extending oneself in order to reach others, otherwise called ‘reciprocity.’ If one does not proceed in this way, then “one’s commands ran counter to what they enjoyed so the people did not follow them.”

In early Confucian texts, then, sometimes the Golden Rule was subordinated to the virtue of benevolence, but other times was used in a looser, metaphorical way to illustrate correct political action.

It was not until after Buddhism came to China that Neo-Confucians gave these classical expressions of the Golden Rule a more important role in their ethical systems. Examples of Neo-Confucians who did this are Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622-1685) in Japan and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1723-1777) in China. Fumihiko Takahashi has explored the way that “Ancient Learning” school in Japan expanded the role of the Golden Rule in Confucianism. A short time later, Dai Zhen also turned to the general principle as a means of rejecting the radical intuitionism of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529). Philip J. Ivanhoe describes Dai’s moral theory:

It is the orderly pattern of the universe which we can come to understand through careful examination and study. It is not within us already; it is something we come

15 The “Banfa jie” 兩法解 chapter of the Warring States Guanzi 管子 (p. 340) uses the Golden Rule as a metaphor for reflexivity in an economic context: 己之所不安，勿施於人。故曰：「審用財，慎施報，察稱量。」 “Do not impose on others what makes you uneasy. Therefore it is said: ‘Be careful about using your resources, pay attention to what you give to others in return, and investigate into the weights of the balance.'”

16 Sizhu zhangju jizhu, 9.

to realize through acquiring certain kinds of knowledge and augmenting this with a systematic application of the Confucian Golden Rule.\textsuperscript{18}

In contrast to earlier Confucian commentators, then, Dai Zhen did not just treat the Golden Rule in the context of commenting on specific passages in the canon that contained its formulations, but foregrounded it in his discussion of the entire corpus. In a sense both Yamaga and Dai were following the lead of Zhu Xi (1130-1200) who attempted to systematize Confucianism and ended up giving the Golden Rule a larger role in its moral theory. Zhu noticed the difference between the different formulations of the Golden Rule in the early classics, and argued that the “Great Learning” formulation was the “reciprocity of giving someone responsibility” (\textit{zeren zhi shu} 責人之恕) while the \textit{Analects} formulation was the “reciprocity of taking care of someone” (\textit{airen zhi shu} 愛人之恕).\textsuperscript{19} By making a modal distinction (to use John Henderson’s term), he makes “reciprocity” a multi-faceted and therefore more central concept in Confucian ethics. The more important role that Golden Rule formulations played in Neo-Confucian thinking is perhaps a result of the way that Confucianism had moved from a developmental model of virtue acquisition to a discovery model, to use Ivanhoe’s terminology. As such, good actions were not defined in terms of particular contexts as much as in terms of abstract principles. While early Confucianism was not especially compatible with the Golden Rule, later Confucianism was more so.

III. How Does the Golden Rule work?

Of particular interest to philosophers are the myriad ways of repairing the formal principle of the Golden Rule. For Confucians, too, it appears to have been implicit that application of the formulations of the Golden Rule meant embedding the principle in a broader system. This contextualization, already noted above, was noticed by the missionary James Legge:

Still, Confucius delivered his rule to his countrymen only, and only for their guidance in their [five archetypal social] relations of which I have had so much occasion to speak. The rule of Christ is for man as man, having to do with other men, all with himself on the same platform, as the children and subjects of the one God and Father in heaven.\textsuperscript{20}

Indeed, Legge’s critique is another way of saying that the Golden Rule was subordinated to the general Confucian social system. Indeed, in most Confucian contexts proper ritual action is indexed to one’s place in the social hierarchy, and so it is hard to imagine the application of an unrepaired version of the Golden Rule not eliciting harsh punishment.


\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Zhuzi yulei} 朱子語類 16.70.

\textsuperscript{20} Legge, \textit{op. cit.}, 110.
Yet this obscures the way that early Chinese society imposed a web of obligations on the moral actor, making it difficult to meaningfully compare the place of the Golden Rule in early Chinese ethics with its role in other religious contexts. Legge’s direct comparison obscures the ways in which Confucianism was a hybrid system that relied on the authority of the classics, on conceptions of human nature, on sacred ritual practices, and on the historical precedents of the Sage-kings. So the Golden Rule is perhaps best seen as an existing resource in early Chinese culture that was selectively incorporated into Confucianism.

We may take Bernard Gert’s objections to the Golden Rule as a guide for conduct as a starting point to answer the question of how the Golden Rule worked contextually in China. Gert argues that: “The Golden Rule also requires, and students might like this, that teachers not give flunking grades to students even if they deserve it.” Here, the analysis of the Confucian use of the Golden Mean by philosopher Herbert Fingarette directly addresses Gert’s perceived shortcoming. Fingarette argues that the Golden Rule in Confucianism offers a chance to reflect on our role or roles in the social system, and take a “detached” view of ourselves. Fingarette, in fact, draws a different conclusion about the paradigmatic case raised by Gert when he limns the Golden Rule’s considerations about a student who requests a better grade to get into Law School:

…my better judgment as I contemplate myself leads me to wish that, were this really me, the instructor would not indulge my panic-induced escapism, would confront me with the fact that instead of trying to learn from my error I was starting my college career by blaming the “system,” and that I was undermining my capacity to act responsibly and to learn how to succeed in classwork legitimately.

The answer to the student is the opposite of what Gert says it would be.

Fingarette’s reading of the implications of the Chinese Golden Rule in this situation is based on the concept of “reciprocity” in early Confucian texts. He writes: “What [shu] does is to require that I not make that ultimate judgment except as I concurrently make the effort to appreciate, imaginatively, as if I were he, the consequences and meaning of my act for the other person.” Indeed, while the application of the Golden Rule in classical texts was more often than not indexed to particular positions vis a vis a kinship group or the ritual/political hierarchy, there is not fundamentally a difference in the basic reflexive principle behind the evaluation of actions. Further, the difference in roles and differences in life experience are often key to properly assessing a situation and applying the Golden Rule in a more reasonable way. Gert’s critique of an unrepaired version of the Golden Rule clearly would not apply to the more sophisticated interpretation of the Confucian Golden Rule that Fingarette provides.

IV. How Does the Golden Rule Matter?

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In Confucianism, the Golden Rule is fundamentally the idea of reversibility as a guide for action. It is therefore a “method” integrated into the practice of benevolence (in the Analects) into good government (in the Records of Ritual) and into a theoretical antidote for intuitionist approaches to ethics (for later writers like Dai Zhen). It is not—at least not for the earliest Confucians—consistently seen as a universal guide to moral action. This fact provides a much more substantive basis to ask whether the formulations of the Golden Rule in China first pointed out by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci actually should be called “Golden Rule” than the historically more controversial issue of “Silver Rule” formulation ever did. To the extent that the classical expression of Golden Rule style statements were applied more widely and more universally by post-Buddhist Confucians, the role of these expressions within the Chinese cultural system changed over time, and it can be said the Golden Rule “mattered” more to later writers.

Yet describing the nature of the relation of the Golden Rule to broader moral or cultural systems is a complex task. A measure of the high degree of embeddedness of the Golden Rule within the Chinese cultural system is that questions about consequences for violating the Golden Rule cannot be answered in a general way. It is not clear that social roles always trumped reflexivity in moral decision-making, nor is the opposite unambiguously true. Instead, in a way that is perhaps more suitable to a Virtue Ethics system than a Consequentialist one, the balance is a matter to be determined by the morally cultivated individual. The Chinese situation is closer to how Ernest Burton once described the Golden Rule in general as “not in actual application a rule at all. It is a principle of wide application, and in the actual relations of life, because they are so complex, difficult to apply.”

What this means is that it Legge is not strictly right to assert that Confucius only taught people to apply reflexivity for “guidance in their [five archetypal social] relations.” A counterexample is the Analects 12.2 imperative: “although you are delegating commoners, still behave as if you are undertaking great sacrifices.” In 12.2, the treatment being described appears to cross the lines of social class. A modern version of Legge’s criticism is that unless the formulation of the Golden Rule explicitly advocates social leveling, it is incomplete. Martha Nussbaum reacts to Nivison’s assertion that the Chinese version of the Golden Rule is “the very ground of community, without which no morality could develop at all. . . reassuring both that person and myself of our common humanity” with skepticism because of the hierarchical framework to which the maxim is indexed. She argues that there is no sense of shared humanity implied by an argument that says “Treat your dogs the way you’d like to be treated by the gods” because such a thought does not involve questioning the hierarchy between dogs and people. Nussbaum faults the “missing thought” in Chinese moral philosophy as a

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concept of moral luck, “the thought that many of the most important distinctions among human beings are the work of fortune, unconnected to human desert.”

It is possible to fault both Nivison and Nussbaum for assuming that formulations of the Golden Rule are either quieted by social hierarchies, or drown them out in a blast of moral universalism. Instead, it is probably wiser to align the classical formulations of the Golden Rule in China with those pre-modern religious imperatives that were not absolute in the sense of the Kant’s “Categorical Imperative.” This is consistent with the fact that the earliest instances are a mixture of a situationally appropriate moral imperative and a metaphorical tool for talking about reflexivity. It also illustrates the way in which the early Chinese Golden Rule played a role in moral systems, but was a far cry from Locke’s “foundation of all social virtue.”

Ibid. Nussbaum, who appears to be operating simply from Nivison’s article and a set of assumptions about the nature of Chinese religion, fails to appreciate the degree to which the Analects does indeed have a strong notion of moral luck. A famous example is 12.5: “Life and death are a matter of ming, while riches and nobility are a matter of tian,” 死生有命 富貴在天.