Comparing religions requires identifying points in common, so as to highlight the contrasts between and among them. Without shared traits religions subject to comparison yield observations lacking consequence. If all religions concur that the sun rises in the east, what generalization do we learn about all of those religions that clarifies their shared character? And what follows for the particular characterization of any one of those religions? For religions bear distinctive traits. What they share by definition is commonplace, outweighed by what distinguishes them from one another. The more widespread a shared trait among religions, the more it lacks consequence for any particular context.

I propose that a proposition common to a number of religions bears no consequence for the description, analysis, and interpretation of any one of those religions in particular: what is common produces the commonplace. That proposition requires the analysis of a set of religions that share a proposition. It demands an estimate of the importance of the shared proposition in those religions, respectively. But how are we to demonstrate that a trait shared by numerous religions does not play a differentiating role in any given religion? That intuitive proposition requires a test, which I shall carry out here.

The test requires describing the encompassing traits of a religion and its propositions. These propositions are to be shown to form a system of ideas — not random and episodic observations about this and that but a coherent composition. Then the role of the Golden Rule in the articulation of the system is to be assessed by appeal to the logic that sustains the system.

A religious system will appeal to a particular logic. Hypothetically reconstructing that logic will permit us to predict what the religion will say about a topic that is not articulately expounded. Such a system will generate solutions to problems not addressed in the formative writings of the religion: if we know this, what else do we know? Thus from the proposition, “two apples plus two apples equal four apples,” the system invites the hypothesis, “two” (anything) plus “two” (anything) equal four (anything). That illustrates what I mean by a religious system. It is a mode of thought or logic characteristic of a set of religious ideas that generates new truth, accommodates fresh data, permits us to make predictions concerning what must follow from a given
proposition. The logic of the system then is brought to bear upon the new truth and self-evidence enters in.

That returns us to the task of comparing religions through what is alike and what is different. What is common among several religious traditions does not fit well with what is particular to any one of them. The distinctive logic of a given religion will be obscured by what can just as well fit a competing system. Religions cannot affirm everything and its opposite. So if religious systems coincide, that upon which they concur cannot maintain a consequential, differentiating proposition but only a commonplace in both senses of the word: what is common to a number of systems, what makes slight difference in any of those systems. And my thesis here is as follows:

*a proposition that is shared among several religious systems will not play a major role in the construction of any particular religious system.*

Religions by their nature differ. They conflict. When they agree, therefore, it is because the point of congruence is systemically neutral to the systems that concur — episodic, not systematic, and commonplace, not consequential.

To test that proposition, I take the Golden Rule, which represents what is common to a variety of religious systems, and I invoke classical Judaism and its canon, which here stands for a coherent religious system. A review of the representation of the Golden Rule in the formative canon will allow us to assess the importance attached to it. We consider its position in the Judaic religious system and measure its generative power. What I shall show is that the Golden Rule is parachuted down into classical Judaism and plays no systemic role in the construction of that system.

The Golden Rule is called the encompassing principle of the Torah, but when the system undertakes to generalize, it ignores the Golden Rule. The faithful are admonished to go, study the generative data of the Golden Rule, but when the system invokes the Golden Rule, it does not elaborate and extend it, analyzing its implications for fresh problems. To state the proposition simply: in classical Judaism the Golden Rule is inert, not active, inconsequential in an exact sense of the word, not weighty in secondary development. It yields nothing beyond itself and does not invite new questions or stimulate speculation about new problems. The Golden Rule emerges as a commonplace that the system invokes without extension and elaboration.

We turn to the case at hand, the Golden Rule in Classical Judaism, the Judaic religious system set forth in the Israelite Scriptures as interpreted by the Rabbinic sages of the first six centuries C.E. The canon of that Judaism contains an explicit expression of the Golden Rule. It is framed in both moral and ethical terms, the moral referring to good or bad, the ethical to right or wrong. Scripture’s formulation in terms of morality occurs in the commandment of love: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). At issue is attitude, with action implicit. The first century sage, Hillel, is cited as stating the Golden Rule in ethical terms, “What is hateful to you to your fellow don’t do.” That negative formulation of the Golden Rule applies to concrete relationships among ordinary people. And what is noteworthy is that classical Judaism maintains that the biblical commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), defines the heart of the Torah, which is to say, what we should call the essence of Judaism: its ethics and its theology.
That judgment is set forth in the Talmud, the extension and amplification of the Torah, in a famous story about the sage, Hillel. Hillel reformulated Lev. 19:18, the rule of reciprocal love, in terms of action (don’t do) rather than attitude (love your neighbor):

A. [In Hebrew:] There was another case of a gentile who came before Shammai. He said to him, “Convert me on the stipulation that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.” He drove him off with the building cubit that he had in his hand.
B. He came before Hillel: “Convert me.”
C. He said to him [in Aramaic], “What is hateful to you, to your fellow don’t do.’ That’s the entirety of the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study.”

Bavli Shabbat 31a/I.12

The concluding counsel, “Go, study,” points to the task of elaborating the Golden Rule to cover a variety of specific ethical cases. Notice how the formulation shifts from the positive, love, to the negative, “what is hateful to you to your fellow don’t do.” But in both positive and negative formulations, the focus is on “your fellow,” and in context that excludes the stranger. A second glance, however, shows that the lacuna in the Judaic formulation of the Golden Rule was filled. It dealt with the question, who is my neighbor? To find the answer for classical Judaism, we turn to the reading in ethical terms of the theological teaching of Lev. 19:18. That reading invokes Hillel’s formulation, “That’s the entirety of the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study.” The issue emerges in a dispute on the encompassing principle of the Torah:

7. A. “…but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: [I am the Lord]:”
   B. R. Aqiba says, “This is the encompassing principle of the Torah.”
   C. Ben Azzai says, “‘This is the book of the generations of Adam’ (Gen. 5:1) is a still more encompassing principle.”

Sifra CC:III

Aqiba, who flourished a century after Hillel, recapitulates the judgment that the Golden Rule of reciprocity as stated at Lev. 19:18 lies at the heart of the Torah. But in that setting the issue of who is my neighbor figures. The dispute between Aqiba and Ben Azzai makes clear that in Aqiba’s judgment by “my neighbor” not everyone is meant. That emerges in what is implicit as the opposite of Ben Azzai’s position. While Aqiba, like Hillel before him, identifies the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself as the encompassing principle of the Torah, Ben Azzai invokes the universal definition of one’s neighbor. One’s fellow is any other person.

Ben Azzai accordingly chooses a still more compendious principle, “This is the book of the generations of Adam,” which encompasses not only “your neighbor” but all humanity. For the “book of the generations of Adam” covers all the known peoples. By showing how all nations derive genealogically from Adam and Eve the Torah establishes that humanity forms a common family. One’s fellow is one’s cousin, however many times removed. In the context of Genesis, which sets forth the theory that “Israel” is constituted by the extended family of Abraham and Sarah, the metaphor of a family covering all of the nations of the world carries a weighty message. So at issue is the

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1 Italics signify Aramaic in the original. The Talmud is a bilingual document, in Hebrew and in Aramaic. The Golden Rule is formulated in Aramaic for its ethical version, in Hebrew for its theological statement.
governing metaphor. Ben Azzai sees humanity as united in its common genealogy beginning with Adam and Eve, and it is in that context that Ben Azzai’s reading of “Love your neighbor as yourself” rejects the Golden Rule as too limited in its application.

By his contrary choice of a relevant Scripture as the heart of the matter, Ben Azzai implies the negative judgment that loving one’s neighbor limits the commandment of love to one’s own group. This he does when he selects a statement that transcends the limits of a particular group. Lev. 19:17-18 establishes a context for his criticism. For it states: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but reasoning, you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17-18). The clear intent is to frame matters in terms of your brother and your own people. No wonder, then, that to oppose that position Ben Azzai has chosen a verse that refers to all humanity.

But that is not the end of the story. Leviticus 19:31-32 explicitly extends the rule of love to the stranger or outsider:

1. A. [“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:31-32).]

4. A. “…you shall not do him wrong:”
   B. You should not say to him, “Yesterday you were worshipping idols and now you have come under the wings of the Presence of God.”

5. A. “…as a native among you:”
   B. Just as a native is one who has accepted responsibility for all the teachings of the Torah, so a proselyte is to be one who has accepted responsibility for all the words of the Torah.

6. A. “… shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself:”
   B. Just as it is said to Israel, “You will love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18),
   C. so it is said with regard to proselytes, “You shall love him as yourself.”

7. A. “…for you were strangers in the land of Egypt:”
   B. Know the soul of strangers, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Sifra CCV:I

Here is an explicit definition of the commandment to love the outsider, and Lev. 19:18 is cited to apply to the stranger. So much for the representation of the Golden Rule in Classical Judaism, a fundamental teaching stated with economy. A negative judgment is in order: the Golden Rule is designated as the fundamental principle of the Torah, but we look in vain for elaborations of the matter, that promise of an elaborate commentary for Leviticus 19:18 that Hillel invoked.

I. **WHAT DOES THE GOLDEN RULE SAY?**

The Golden Rule emphasizes reciprocity, in Hillel’s formulation stating that one must not do to one’s fellow what he would not have him do to himself. But the setting for that teaching hardly intersects with the ethical or moral teaching itself. The story about Hillel makes a point that has nothing to do with the Golden Rule. The contrast with Shammai yields the model of the patient sage as against the captious one. The narrative emphasizes that lesson: “He drove him off with the building cubit that he had in his hand.” In the Rabbinic formulation of the Golden Rule, Lev. 19:18 and Hillel’s reformulation of it into ethical categories do not define the point of the setting that
contains the ethical rule. The Golden Rule takes a subordinated position to the editorial purpose of the story that is told. The composite aims to contrast Rabbinic patience with Rabbinic arrogance.

Here is the entire Rabbinic version of the context in which the Golden Rule delivers its message. What we want to know is what role is assigned to the narrative of the Golden Rule in the composite that demonstrates how a person always should be humble, like Hillel the Elder, and not captious, like Shammai the Elder. Does the Golden Rule figure prominently in the elaboration of the proofs or is it a mere station on the road to virtue? What literary device assimilates the Golden Rule into the larger composite, and what importance, what generative promise, is accorded to the narrative of the Golden Rule?

I.10   A. Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority:
B. A person always should be humble, like Hillel the Elder, and not captious, like Shammai the Elder.
C. There was the case of two people, [31A] who went and made a bet with one another for four hundred zuz.
D. They stipulated, “Whoever can go and infuriate Hillel will get the four hundred zuz.”
E. One of them went [to try]. That day was a Friday, toward nightfall, and Hillel was washing his hair. The man came and knocked on the door, saying, “Where is Hillel, where is Hillel?”
F. Hillel wrapped himself up in his cloak and came to meet him. He said to him, “My son, what do you require?”
G. He said to him, “I have a question to ask.”
H. He said to him, “Ask, my son, ask.”
I. He said to him, “How come the Babylonians have round heads?”
J. He said to him, “My son, you have asked quite a question: It’s because they don’t have skilled midwives.”
K. He went and waited a while and came back and knocked on the door. He said, “Who’s here? Who’s here?”
L. Hillel wrapped himself up in his cloak and came out.
M. He said to him, “My son, what do you need?”
N. He said to him, “Why are the eyes of the people of Palmyra [Tadmor] bleary?”
O. He said to him, “By son, you’ve asked quite a question. It’s because they live in the sands of the desert and the winds blow and scatter the sand into their eyes. Therefore their eyes are bleary.”
P. He went and waited a while and came back and knocked on the door. He said, “Who’s here? Who’s here?”
Q. Hillel wrapped himself up in his cloak and came out.
R. He said to him, “My son, what do you need?”
S. He said to him, “I need to ask a question.”
T. He said to him, “Go ahead.”
U. He said to him, “Why are the feet of the Africans flat?”
V. He said to him, “Because they live by swamps, and every day walk in water, therefore their feet are flat.”
W. He said to him, “I have a lot of questions to ask, but I’m afraid that you’ll get mad.”
X. He said to him, “Whatever questions that you have, go and ask.”
Y. He said to him, “Are you the Hillel, whom people call the patriarch of Israel?”
Z. He said to him, “Yup.”
AA. He said to him, “Well, if that’s who you are, then I hope there won’t be many in Israel like you!”
BB. He said to him, “My son, how come?”
CC. He said to him, “You have cost me four hundred zuz.”
DD. He said to him, “You should be careful of your moods! Hillel is worth your losing four hundred zuz without Hillel’s losing his temper” [The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan XV:IV.1].
I.11  A. Our rabbis have taught on Tannaitic authority:  
B. There was the incident of a certain gentile who came before Shammai. He said to him,  
"How many Torahs do you have?"  
C. He said to him, "Two, one in writing, one memorized."  
D. He said to him, "As to the one in writing, I believe you. As to the memorized one, I do  
not believe you. Convert me on condition that you will teach me only the Torah that is in writing."
E. He rebuked him and threw him out.  
F. He came before Hillel. He said to him, "Convert me." [ARN: My lord, how many Torahs  
were given?] He said to him, "Two, one in writing, one memorized." He said to him, "As to the one  
in writing, I believe you. As to the memorized one, I do not believe you."]  
G. On the first day he said to him, "Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet." The next day he reversed the  
order on him.  
H. He said to him, "Well, yesterday, didn't you say it differently?"  
I. He said to him, "Didn't you depend on me then? Then depend on me when it comes to  
the fact of the memorized Torah too." [ARN: He said to him, "My son, sit." He wrote for him, Alef, bet. He  
said to him, "What is this?" He said to him, "An alef." He said to him, "This is not an alef but a bet." He  
said to him, "What is this?" He said to him, "Bet." He said to him, "This is not a bet but a gimmel." He said  
to him, "How do you know that this is an alef and this a bet and this a gimmel? But that is what our  
ancestors have handed over to us — the tradition that this is an alef, this a bet, this a gimmel. Just as you  
have accepted this teaching in good faith, so accept the other in good faith" [The Fathers According to  
Rabbi Nathan XV:V.1].
I.12  A. There was another case of a gentile who came before Shammai. He said to him, "Convert  
me on the stipulation that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot." He drove him  
off with the building cubit that he had in his hand.  
B. He came before Hillel; "Convert me."  
C. He said to him, "'What is hateful to you, to your fellow don't do.' That's the entirety of  
the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study."  
I.13  A. There was another case of a gentile. He was passing behind a synagogue and heard a  
child reciting in Scripture: This is the clothing which they shall make: A breastplate, ephod, and robe (Ex.  
28:4).  
B. He said to them, "All this honor — for whom is it designated?"  
C. They said to him, "It is for the high priest who stands and carries out the service at the  
alter."
D. That gentile said to himself, "I'm going to go and convert so that they'll make me high  
priest."  
E. He came before Shammai and said to him, "Convert me on the stipulation that you make  
me high priest so that I may carry out the service at the altar."  
F. He threw him out with the builder's cubit that he had in his hand. [ARN: He said to him,  
"Is there no priesthood in Israel, and do we not have high priests to stand and carry out the acts of service at  
the altar assigned to the high priest, so that a mere convert who has come only with his staff and wallet may  
come and take up the service of the high priest?"]  
G. He came before Hillel and said to him, "My lord, convert me, [ARN: on the stipulation  
that you make me high priest so that I may carry out the service at the altar]."
H. He said to him, "Do they appoint a king unless it is someone who knows the rules of  
government? Go, study the art of kings."  
I. He went and studied Scripture. When he came to the sentence, "The non-priest who  
draws near [the altar] shall die (Num. 1:51), he said to him, "Concerning what sort of person is this verse  
stated?"
J. He said to him, "Even David the king of Israel."  
K. The proselyte constructed an argument a fortiori concerning himself: If an Israelite, who  
is called a son of the Omnipresent, and concerning whom the Presence of God has said, 'And you shall be  
mine as a kingdom of priests and a holy people' (Ex. 19:6), nonetheless is subject to Scripture's  
admonition, 'The non-priest who draws near [the altar] shall die' (Num. 1:51), I, who am a mere proselyte,  
who has come only with my wallet, all the more so!"  
L. He came before Shammai. He said to him, "So am I suitable for taking the office of high  
priest? And isn't it written in the Torah, 'The non-priest who draws near [the altar] shall die' (Num. 1:51)?"
M. He came before Hillel the Elder and said to him, “Hillel the humble! May all the blessings that are in the Torah rest on your head, for if you had been like Shammai the Elder, you would have wiped me out of this world and of the world to come. Your humility has brought me into this world and the coming one.”

N. After a while the three of them happened to meet. He said, “The surliness of Shammai wanted to drive me from the world, the kindliness of Hillel brought me under the wings of the Presence of God [The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan XV:V.2].

This vast formal composite subordinates the Golden Rule to the redactor’s program, explicitly announced: A person always should be humble, like Hillel the Elder, and not captious, like Shammai the Elder. To that program the Golden Rule is tangential, any other proposition can be and is made to serve. So the appeal to the dual Torah — another fundamental of Rabbinic Judaism — demonstrates.

To answer the first question: In Judaism the Golden Rule is framed positively in Scripture to deal with moral reciprocity and negatively in the Rabbinic composite to deal with ethical reciprocity. It is formulated in a narrative setting but the narrative does not center upon the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is hardly integral to the narrative. It serves as merely one among several narratives to illustrate the primacy of patience. So the Golden Rule is formulated within a narrative but not as an integral and extenuating component of a narrative.

II. WHAT DOES THE GOLDEN RULE MEAN?

The climactic point of the narrative involving Hillel and the Golden Rule is that the entire Torah can be extracted from the Golden Rule — a formidable claim. The Golden Rule in its theological formulation is represented as the recapitulation of the entire Torah. Judaism’s negative formulation of the ethical version of the Golden Rule by Hillel complements Scripture’s affirmative theological version. Given the remarkable claim in behalf of the Golden Rule as the encompassing rule that takes account of the entire Torah, we come to a surprising fact. The Golden Rule is nowhere elaborated. I find in the classical canon of Judaism no attempt to amplify the proposition that the entire Torah is embodied in the Golden Rule. Hillel’s mandate, “Now go study,” bears no instructions on what one should study, no guidance in how we are to discern the principle of reciprocity in the law and in the ethics of Judaism.

A. LITERATURE

That free-standing position accorded to the Golden Rule is signaled by the literary context for the Golden Rule. As the extensive composite indicates, the Golden Rule is parachuted down, whole and complete, into the composite that preserves it. It is interchangeable with other narratives. But it does not connect to them and is not represented in dialogue with them. It is interchangeable with other narratives that praise patience over impatience and its particular message — the Golden Rule — does not contribute a message integral to the propositional context that sustains the composite. The Talmud’s routine analytical inquiry plays no role, and the dialectical argument that animates talmudic discourse contributes nothing. The narrative of Hillel is not naturalized into the Talmud or subjected to the Talmud’s usual processes of criticism and testing.
We do not know what in that context provokes the appearance of the Golden Rule in particular, and the variety of the propositions that find a place alongside the Golden Rule underscore the autonomy of the proposition. We do not have in the composite a proposition provoked by the Golden Rule. More to the point, the other compositions, also free standing, do not intersect with the Golden Rule — even though it is designated as the comprehensive proposition of the Torah — but make their own points. The literary context does not constrain the Golden Rule’s meaning by glossing it or embedding it in a highly particular setting or circumstance.

B. INTERPRETATION

How important is the Golden Rule in the interpretive tradition of classical Judaism? To answer that question we take up the challenge of Hillel: “Go, study.” Specifically, we ask where in the Rabbinic system the principle of reciprocity governs. Then if we generalize matters, the Golden Rule does form the comprehensive principle of the Torah. If I had to specify how the Golden Rule permeates the Judaic law and theology, I would point to the Rabbinic doctrine of justice: measure for measure. Then even though the Golden Rule as formally expressed presents an enigma and a paradox, the Golden Rule does register. Its principle of reciprocity indeed permeates the Rabbinic system of law and theology alike. What imparts to the Golden Rule the power of self-evidence? It is the articulation of the principle of justice or fairness: it is only fair that what one does not want done to himself one should not do to his fellow. In law the Golden Rule in Judaism forms a variation on the theme of justice and fairness.

That is expressed simply: By the measure that one metes out to others one’s own measure is meted out. That principle of appropriate punishment so the punishment fits the crime, is expressed through the case of the wife suspected of unfaithfulness. She is subjected to an ordeal of drinking water that produces marks of a curse in the guilty adulteress but nothing in the innocent one. Here is how the Mishnah expounds the principle of justice, the reciprocity of punishment for sin.

Mishnah Sotah 1:7 A. By that same measure by which a man metes out [to others], they mete out to him: B. She primped herself for sin, the Omnipresent made her repulsive. C. She exposed herself for sin, the Omnipresent exposed her. D. With the thigh she began to sin, and afterward with the belly, therefore the thigh suffers the curse first, and afterward the belly. E. (But the rest of the body does not escape [punishment].)

1:8 A. Samson followed his eyes [where they led him], therefore, the Philistines put out his eyes, since it is said,” And the Philistines laid hold on him and put out his eyes (Judges 16:21). B. Absalom was proud of his hair, therefore, he was hung by his hair [II Sam. 14:25-26]. C. And since he had sexual relations with ten concubines of his father, therefore, they thrust ten spears into his body, since it is said, “And ten young men that carried Joab’s armor surrounded and smote Absalom and killed him” (II Sam. 18:15). D. And since he stole three hearts — his father’s, the court’s, and the Israelites’—since it is said,” And Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel” (II Sam. 15:6) — therefore, three darts were thrust into him, since it is said, “And he took three darts in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom” (II Sam. 18:14).

1:9 A. And so is it on the good side:
B. Miriam waited a while for Moses, since it is said, “And his sister stood afar off” (Ex. 2:4), therefore, Israel waited on her seven days in the wilderness, since it is said, “And the people did not travel on until Miriam was brought in again” (Num. 12:15).
C. Joseph had the merit of burying his father, and none of his brothers was greater than he, since it is said, “And Joseph went up to bury his father . . . and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen” (Gen. 50:7,9).
D. We have none so great as Joseph, for only Moses took care of his [bones].
E. Moses had the merit of burying the bones of Joseph, and none in Israel was greater than he, since it is said, “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him” (Ex. 13:19).
F. We have none so great as Moses, for only the Holy One blessed be He took care of his [bones], since it is said, “And he buried him in the valley” (Dt. 34:6).
G. And not of Moses alone have they stated [this rule], but of all righteous people, since it is said, And your righteousness shall go before you. “The glory of the Lord shall gather you [in death]” (Is. 58:8).

The Tosefta vastly expands the exposition of the principle of exact justice, the reciprocity of the penalty, so that what one planned to do to his fellow is done to him instead. I cite only a small segment of its elaborate exposition.

Tosefta Sotah
3:1 A. R. Meir did say, “On what basis do you rule that by that same measure by which a man metes out, they mete out to him [M. Sot. 1:7A]?
B. “Since it is said, ‘By measure in sending her away thou does contend wish her’ (Is. 27:8) — I know only that he measured out with a seah. How do I know that if he measured out with a qab, a half-qab, a third-qab, a halfthird-qab, [the same rule applies]?
C. “Since it says, ‘For all the armor of the armed man’ (Is. 9:4), lo, you have here many measures.
D. “I know only that this applies to something which comes by measure.
E. “How do I know that perutot add up to a large sum?
F.” Since it is said, ‘Laying one thing to another to find out the account’” [Qoh. 7:27].
3:2 A. And so you find that with regard to the accused wife: With the measure with which she measured out, with that measure do they mete out to her.
B. She stood before him so as to be pretty before him, therefore a priest stands her up in front of everybody to display her shame, as it is said, “And the priest will set the woman before the Lord” (Num. 5:18).
3:3 A. She wrapped a beautiful scarf for him, therefore a priest takes her cap from her head and puts it under foot.
B. She braided her hair for him, therefore a priest loosens it.
C. She painted her face for him, therefore her face is made to turn yellow.
D. She put blue on her eyes for him, therefore her eyes bulge out.
3:4 A. She signaled to him with her finger, therefore her fingernails fall off.
B. She showed him her flesh, therefore a priest tears her cloak and shows her shame in public.
C. She tied on a belt for him, therefore a priest brings a rope of twigs and ties it above her breasts, and whoever wants comes and stares at her [M. Sot. 1:6C-D].
D. She pushed her thigh at him, therefore her thigh falls.
E. She took him on her belly, therefore her belly swells.
F. She fed him goodies, therefore her meal-offering is fit for a cow.
G. She gave him the best wines to drink in elegant goblets, therefore the priest gives her the bitter water to drink in a clay pot.
3:5 A. She acted in secret, as it is said, “The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me” (Job 24:15).
B. And she does not know that He who is enthroned in the secret place of the world directed his face against her, since it is said, “And he disguises his face” (Job 25:14).
C. This teaches that the Omnipresent brings her secret out into the open, since it is said, “Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly showed before the congregation” (Prov. 26:26).
Now we see how the principle of justice — “measure for measure” — permeates the Scriptural narrative. That permits us to answer the question, how much interpretive attention does the Golden Rule receive relative to other doctrines, practices, precepts? Once “Loving your neighbor as yourself” and “not doing to the neighbor what one would not have done to oneself” invoke the principle of reciprocity, opportunities for further study multiply. If we ask, Does the interpretive tradition distinguish between reciprocity and retaliation? we must reply, justice is not retaliation, it is righting the balance.

III. HOW DOES THE GOLDEN RULE WORK?

A. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCE

To which segments of society is the Golden Rule directed? The “you” of Scripture and of Hillel’s formulation does not differentiate by class or caste. Women and men are treated equally under the law. The Golden Rule applies uniformly across genders and social classes. The story about Hillel presupposes the opposite of literacy and a certain level of education is not assumed. “Go, study” invites the hearer to follow the exposition of probative cases of Scripture. God in the Torah is the author of or authority behind the Golden Rule, which applies all the time and not only in particular circumstances.

B. ACTOR AND RECIPIENT

The model for the actor of the Golden Rule is God, and the record of his actions is in Scripture. God acts with justice and responds to virtue with reciprocity. The Golden Rule assumes that the actor is an autonomous moral agent. His subjective and individual desires are the basis for the actions taken toward the other. That is why the actor bears responsibility for his action. And it is because he bears responsibility that the actor is admonished to treat the other as he wishes himself to be treated. What defines ethical conduct is moral attitude, and right and wrong, good and bad, are conveyed by the Torah, hence “go, study.” That imposes limits on the moral attitude: “what is hateful to you to your fellow do not do.” That is not an invitation to subjectivity because the Torah intervenes.

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? The expositions we have reviewed of the Golden Rule and its extension in the principle of measure for measure leave no doubt. It is taken for granted that one treats oneself with dignity and respect. The Golden Rule’s basic reference point is the actor not the recipient of the action, the self not the other. Empathy is not at issue in the exposition of justice, and there is no hint of subjective judgment.

D. VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION
Does the Golden Rule sanction violence or oppression against others? If so, which circumstances make such behavior acceptable? Legitimate violence is executed by the community, and the Golden Rule does not intervene. The Golden Rule aims at bringing about a just resolution of conflict, and it does not conceive that the penalties of the law bring about oppression. The death penalty brings about justice, and even though the judges who inflict the penalty would not want to be subjected to execution, they act with justice. That point registers in the execution of Achan by Joshua:

**Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1**
A. [When] the trial is over, [and the felon is convicted], they take him out to stone him.
B. The place of stoning is well outside the court, as it is said, “Bring forth him who cursed to a place outside the camp” (Lev. 24:14).
C. One person stands at the door of the courthouse, with flags in his hand, and a horseman is some distance from him, so that he is able to see him.
D. [If] one of the judges said, “I have something to say in favor of acquittal,” the one at the door waves the flags, and the horseman races off and stops [the execution].
E. And even if [the convicted party] says, “I have something to say in favor of my own acquittal,” they bring him back,
F even four or five times,
G. so long as there is substance in what he has to say.
H. [If] they then found him innocent, they dismiss him.
I. And if not, he goes out to be stoned.
J. And a herald goes before him, crying out, “Mr. So-and-so, son of ME Soand-so, is going out to be stoned because he committed such-and-such a transgression, and ML So and-so and Mr. So-and-so are the witnesses against him. Now anyone who knows grounds for acquittal — let him come and speak in his behalf!”

6:2 A. [When] he was ten cubits from the place of stoning, they say to him, “Confess,” for it is usual for those about to be put to death to confess.
B. For whoever confesses has a share in the world to come.
C. For so we find concerning Achan, to whom Joshua said “My son, I pray you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and confess to him, [and tell me now what you have done: hide it not from me.]” And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly have I sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel and thus and thus I have done” (Josh. 7:19). And how do we know that his confession achieved atonement for him? For it is said, “And Joshua said, Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day” (Josh. 7:25) — This day the Lord will trouble you, but you will not be troubled in the world to come.
D. And if he does not know how to confess, they say to him, “Say as follows: ‘Let my death be atonement for all of my transgressions.’”

Achan is put to death in this world but thereby atones and is punished, so that he may rise from the grave and enjoy eternal life. The death penalty opens the way to the world to come, and justice is not oppression but a medium for righting the balance upset by sin.

**IV. HOW DOES THE GOLDEN RULE MATTER?**

**A. SYSTEMIC SIGNIFICANCE**

How important is the Golden Rule in the system of Judaism? The declaration that the Golden Rule encompasses the Torah and all the rest is commentary assigns to the Rule a critical position. But as we have seen, to define the centrality of the Golden Rule we have to leave the narrow limits of loving one’s neighbor as oneself and introduce the
rule of reciprocity in a generic framework of jurisprudence. So is it central or peripheral? That is a question that can be answered only episodically. When the Rabbinic documents attempt to state the heart of the matter, do they invoke the Golden Rule outside of the context in which it is introduced and made explicit? The answer is simple. We do not find the Golden Rule invoked where we should anticipate locating it. Take the case of an explicit exercise in reduction of the laws to the heart of the matter. I indent the supplementary insertions that amplify the primary statement:

**BAVLI MAKKOT 3:12 II:1/23B-24A**

B. R. Simelai expounded, “Six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five negative ones, corresponding to the number of the days of the solar year, and two hundred forty-eight positive commandments, corresponding to the parts of man’s body.”

C. Said R. Hamnuna, “What verse of Scripture indicates that fact? ‘Moses commanded us Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob’ (Dt. 33:4). The numerical value assigned to the letters of the word Torah is [24A] six hundred and eleven, not counting, ‘I am’ and ‘you shall have no other gods,’ since these have come to us from the mouth of the Almighty.”

D. [Simelai continues:] “David came and reduced them to eleven: ‘A Psalm of David: Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle, and who shall dwell in thy holy mountain? (i) He who walks uprightly and (ii) works righteousness and (iii) speaks truth in his heart and (iv) has no slander on his tongue and (v) does no evil to his fellow and (vi) does not take up a reproach against his neighbor, (vii) in whose eyes a vile person is despised but (viii) honors those who fear the Lord. (ix) He swears to his own hurt and changes not. (x) He does not lend on interest. (xi) He does not take a bribe against the innocent’ (Psalm 15).”

We have the opportunity to invoke the Golden Rule and to amplify the list of virtues by appeal to the principle of reciprocity. But reciprocity does not enter in.

E. “He who walks uprightly:” this is Abraham: “Walk before me and be wholehearted” (Gen. 17:1).

F. “and works righteousness:” this is Abba Hilqiahu.

G. “speaks truth in his heart:” for instance R. Safra.

H. “has no slander on his tongue:” this is our father, Jacob: “My father might feel me and I shall seem to him as a deceiver” (Gen. 27:12).

I. “does no evil to his fellow:” he does not go into competition with his fellow craftsman.

J. “does not take up a reproach against his neighbor:” this is someone who befriends his relatives.

K. “in whose eyes a vile person is despised:” this is Hezekiah, king of Judah, who dragged his father’s bones on a rope bed.

L. “honors those who fear the Lord:” this is Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who, whenever he would see a disciple of a sage, would rise from his throne and embrace and kiss him and call him, “My father, my father, my lord, my lord, my master, my master.”

M. “He swears to his own hurt and changes not:” this is R. Yohanan.

N. For said R. Yohanan, “I shall continue fasting until I get home.”

O. “He does not lend on interest:” not even interest from a gentile.

P. “He does not take a bribe against the innocent:” such as R. Ishmael b. R. Yosé.

Q. “He who does these things shall never be moved:”

R. When Rabban Gamaliel reached this verse of Scripture, he would weep, saying, “If someone did all of these virtuous deeds, then he will never be moved, but not merely on account of one of them.”

S. They said to him, “Is it written, ‘Who does all of these things;’? What is written is only ‘who does these things,’ meaning, even one of them.”

T. “For if you do not say this, then there is another verse of Scripture of which we have to take account: ‘Do not defile yourselves in all of these things’ (Lev. 18:24). Does this mean that one is unclean only if he touches all of these things, but not if he touches only one of them? But does it
not mean, only one of them?

U. “Here too it means that only one of these things is sufficient.”

V. [Simelai continues:] “Isaiah came and reduced them to six: (i) He who walks righteously and (ii) speaks uprightly, (iii) he who despises the gain of oppressions, (iv) shakes his hand from holding bribes, (v) stops his ear from hearing of blood (vi) and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil, he shall dwell on high’ (Isaiah 33:25-26).”

Once more we have the opportunity to invoke the Golden Rule. It comes close to the surface at X: “one who does not belittle his fellow in public.” But there is no appeal to the Golden Rule, though one may claim that it is implicit.

W. “He who walks righteously:” this is our father, Abraham: “For I have known him so that he may command his children and his household after him” (Gen. 18:19).

X. “speaks uprightly:” this is one who does not belittle his fellow in public.

Y. “he who despises the gain of oppressions:” for example, R. Ishmael b. Elisha.

Z. “shakes his hand from holding bribes:” for example, R. Ishmael b. R. Yose.

AA. “stops his ear from hearing of blood:” who will not listen to demeaning talk about a disciple of rabbis and remain silent.

BB. For instance, R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon.

CC. “and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil:” that is in line with what R. Hiyya bar Abba said.

DD. For said R. Hiyya bar Abba, “This is someone who does not stare at women as they are standing and washing clothes.

EE. Concerning such a man it is written, “he shall dwell on high.”

FF. [Simelai continues:] “Micah came and reduced them to three: ‘It has been told you, man, what is good, and what the Lord demands from you, (i) only to do justly and (ii) to love mercy, and (iii) to walk humbly before God’ (Micah 6:8).”

GG. “only to do justly:” this refers to justice.

HH. “to love mercy:” this refers to doing acts of loving kindness.

II. “to walk humbly before God:” this refers to accompanying a corpse to the grave..

JJ. And does this not yield a conclusion a fortiori: if matters that are not ordinarily done in private are referred to by the Torah as “walking humbly before God,” all the more so matters that ordinarily are done in private.

KK. [Simelai continues:] “Isaiah again came and reduced them to two: ‘Thus says the Lord, (i) Keep justice and (ii) do righteousness’ (Isaiah 56:1).

LL. “Amos came and reduced them to a single one, as it is said, ‘For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel. Seek Me and live.’”

MM. Objected R. Nahman bar Isaac, “Maybe the sense is, ‘seek me’ through the whole of the Torah?”

NN. Rather, [Simelai continues:] “Habakkuk further came and based them on one, as it is said, ‘But the righteous shall live by his faith’ (Habakkuk 2:4).”

“The righteous shall live by his faith” treats right attitude toward God as the generative principle of the Torah — and not the ethical rule of reciprocity. One’s trust in God defines the heart of the matter, and in the exposition of that matter loving one’s neighbor as oneself does not register. Here we have an occasion for appeal to the Golden Rule, but there is no hint that the matter makes an impact. Faith and trust in God, now form the heart of the matter. There is no hint that the Golden Rule is the ultimate generative rule of the Torah.

How does the Golden Rule work with the religion’s other component parts — myths, beliefs, rituals, ethics — to produce coherence? The answer is, for the Golden Rule to interact with the theological principles of Judaism, we must invoke the principle
of God’s justice, which man emulates. Then the Golden Rule requires translation into the principle of divine justice. On its own it does not register. It is, as I said, parachuted down into a composite to the details of which the Golden Rule is irrelevant. Other teachings and practices hardly depend on the Golden Rule. We cannot identify specific teachings or actions as particular applications of the Golden Rule. But I can identify no major alternatives or challenges to the Golden Rule. It is inert.

B. CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS

That is why we can point to no consequences of ignoring, disobeying, or otherwise failing to implement the Golden Rule. I can locate no narratives that portray the penalty of neglecting the Golden Rule. That does not mean we have no narratives of divine justice, which illustrate the result of treating one’s fellow in a manner in which one would not like to be treated himself.

Bavli Berakhot 9:1-9 XIX.16/62b
A. R. Eleazar went into a privy. A Roman [= Edomite] came along and pushed him away. R. Eleazar got up and left.
B. A snake came and tore out the [Roman’s] gut.
C. R. Eleazar recited in connection with that man the following verse: "Therefore will I give a man for you' (Is. 43:4). Do not read, 'A man,' but an Edomite [Edom for Adam]."

The narrative registers the working of the principle of measure for measure, it does not say that the Roman was penalized for not treating R. Eleazar as he would like to be treated himself. Nor do we find narratives that speak of the reward for doing so.

C. EXCEPTIONS

Judaism does not justify flouting the Golden Rule. It is not permissible to treat others as you do not want them to treat you.

V. CONCLUSION

Classical Judaism is defined by generative propositions and invites judgment concerning systemic traits. But the Golden Rule in its articulated form is not one of these. Hillel is given another aphorism, one that competes with the Golden Rule:

Abot 1:14 A. He [Hillel] would say,
(1) "If I am not for myself, who is for me?
(2) "And when I am for myself, what am I?
(3) “And if not now, when?”

That forms the corollary to the Golden Rule. One must preserve one’s own dignity. But in doing so, one must accommodate the dignity of others. And the occasion is always the present. Reciprocity requires self-esteem, but also regard for the other, and urgency pervades. If the Golden Rule stands solitary in the Rabbinic system, its corollary stands in splendid isolation even from the Golden Rule, the paradox on which it is built forming an enigmatic variation. What of Hillel’s mandate, Go, study? The legal system and its rules await the analysis of how the Golden Rule pervades the whole. The
theological-narrative system and its exegesis of Scripture wait the extenuation of the conflict captured in the clauses, “If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself, what am I?” When descriptive and analytical work has produced for other religious systems a comparable description of the systemic consequence of the Golden Rule, we shall find it possible to compare the role of the Golden Rule in two or more systems. Then we may generalize about the role of commonplace propositions in religions.
The Golden Rule is a well-entrenched concept in Zoroastrian ethics. It has been advocated and practiced throughout the history of its moral philosophy, a history imbued with remarkable verve and vigor, and conveying a sense of realism and high seriousness in moral life. The very idea of a radical distinction between the good and the bad is an essential source of this vigor. The goal of Zoroastrian ethics is summed up in the triad of “good thought, good word, good action”, and constitutes the foundation for faith. These virtues imply thinking and speaking about the world as an ordered cosmos created by the Good Spirit, performing the acts required to maintain this sense of equilibrium, and conducting a virtuous life by implementing truth, purity, the right measure, and god-given order.

In order to bring out the significance of the Golden Rule within the context of the history of Zoroastrianism, some preliminary general remarks may be helpful: Zoroastrianism, the religion of the ancient Iranians, named after prophet Zarathustra (Zoroastres in Greek sources) is one of the oldest religions in the world, going back to the 2nd millennium BCE. It flourished in the long era of the Sasanian dynasty (224-651 CE) when it was the state religion of the Persian Empire. Zoroastrian sources are principally the Avesta and
the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) texts. These constitute a considerable corpus of liturgies, hymns, commentaries, and theological works, much of it orally transmitted and covering an immense time-span from Zarathustra himself to the late Sasanian period and beyond.

The Avesta contains the sacred texts in Avestan language, which was probably spoken from the second millennium until the first half of the first millennium BCE. It is a collection of texts of different dates and various contents that were orally transmitted for centuries and exposed to the changing views and perceptions of different times, before they were finally written down in about 500 CE. It was organized into twenty-one sections, but much was lost, so that the extant Avesta represents only about two-fifths of the original.

From 520 BCE on we have the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings in Old Persian who worshipped Ahura Mazda and followed the religion of the Avesta. From that time to the seventh century CE Arab-Islamic conquest of Iran, Zoroastrianism was the religion of the Iranian kings. The religion survived foreign invasion and the challenge of new faiths, but in the ninth century many Zoroastrians migrated to India to escape oppression in Iran. It was at that time that Zoroastrian theologians began writing down their knowledge about the religion, producing new compilations in Middle Persian.¹

One of the defining features of Zoroastrian religion, as delineated in the Gathas and in other parts of the Avesta, is the doctrine of dualism. The world is imagined as a field of conflict in which Order and Chaos, good and bad, truth and falsehood, are constantly locked in a struggle for supremacy. God (Ahura Mazda, the Good Spirit, Ohrmazd) and the Devil (Angra Manyu, the Evil Spirit, Ahreman) were both involved in the creation process and the world naturally contains both good and evil elements. The struggle is intense, but the Good will ultimately triumph over the Evil.

This idea of a choice between good and evil has been at the heart of Zoroastrianism throughout its entire history. Freedom of the will forms the basis and foundation of the Zoroastrian ethos. A human being is a creature of the Good Spirit and belongs to the realm of good, but is created as a free agent, and has a right to choose. In fact, all living beings have to make a choice between the constructive and destructive values represented by the two spirits. Those who choose the just become the most precious allies of the Good Spirit in his struggle with the Evil Spirit and will prepare the world for salvation.

At the end of the world, each person is required to pass over the bridge of the Compiler, before which the register of one’s thoughts, words, and deeds is made, accompanied by the Daena. The thoughts, words, and deeds are weighed on a scale and according to the balance tips, the bridge becomes wide or narrow, and the soul will pass safely on to heaven or fall into hell.

The Daena/Den represents the totality of a person’s thoughts, words, and acts in life. In the Pahlavi commentary on Yasna 26.6 Daena is glossed by kunishn "acts". In the Hadokht nask (10-11) and the later Zoroastrian texts, the Daena is identical with the soul’s good thought, speech, and deeds. The first Zoroastrian teachers considered Daena to be "that which one always does"; for in relation to thoughts and words, it is one’s deeds that can effectively be counted and verified (on the day of reckoning), for words are unreliable, thoughts unascertainable, but deeds are palpable, and (it is) by deeds that human beings are judged.

The Zoroastrian religion puts a great emphasis on morals and ethics. A Zoroastrian is expected to be capable of making a conscious effort every moment of his life, to reject all forms of evil and lies in thought, word and deed and strive at all times to walk on the path of Asha, the Cosmic Law of Order and Harmony on which the entire Universe is based. It is through Order that Ohrmazd created the universe and it is through Order that mankind

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will achieve perfection and become one with his creator. In the Avesta it is stated repeatedly that Zarathustra was the first to worship Ahura Mazda’s Order and this became the duty of every good Zoroastrian, as expressed in the *Fravarane*, the Zoroastrian “profession of faith”.

Acts that are in accordance with Order are meritorious and productive activities with respect to land and herds of animals, establishing secure and peaceful settlements and promoting the welfare and the well being of others. But beyond these general utilitarian considerations there are other fundamental issues in the ethical conception: The value of freedom, the right and responsibility of an individual to make his or her own choice is of utmost importance.

The Middle Persian texts constitute the largest corpus of Zoroastrian writings. These texts were mainly collected, edited and codified in the ninth century, but based on earlier traditions. A popular branch of Middle Persian literature consists of *Andarz* or wisdom literature, and it is particularly in this corpus of literature that the Zoroastrian Golden Rule appears, although no specific term for it seems to exist in these texts.

It is possible that the Golden Rule in its first general formulation entered Zoroastrian literature from Mesopotamia. Apart from fragments of the Aramaic version of the trilingual Bisotun inscription found in the Jewish community of Elephantine (mostly from the fifth century BCE), there were also fragments of the writing known by the name of “the Wisdom of Ahiqar”. But summaries of Avestan passages in Middle Persian are also found in the wisdom literature, which testify to the existence of this literature in Iran as early as the period when the late Avestan literature was composed. This was the time when Zoroastrian religion found itself at close quarters with Judaism and Christianity in

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6 For a survey of this literary genre see Shaked, 1987a, pp. 11-16
7 Ahiqar was an Assyrian sage celebrated in the ancient Near East for his wisdom.
the Sasanian period and Zoroastrians had to encounter all kinds of “irreligious” peoples.\(^9\)

The wisdom literature covers mainly three essential topics: instruction on the Zoroastrian code of behavior and morals, advice regarding suitable thought and action in everyday life, and rules of etiquette. The main theme of this literature is wisdom, obtained through experience and for the benefit of the person himself, not for any other purpose. Zoroastrians, by following the advices and counsels of the sages, itself the legacy of the experience of several seasoned and knowledgeable generations, can avoid making mistakes and suffering through their own inexperience. They would all as a result live better lives in the more secure, friendly, and harmonious society that this principle would generate, and co-operate with each other more willingly.

The Zoroastrian wisdom literature cannot be ascribed to a single author, even though several well-known religious personalities, men of authority, kings and counselors, have been named as authors of the most popular ones. These collections are often in the form of questions asked by a disciple or a son with answers provided by the sage in short and pithy sentences that emphasize the moral and spiritual aspects of faith. As Mary Boyce puts it, many of them are simply the surviving representatives of a popular type of oral composition, which have become associated with religious works, and have thus had the chance to survive.\(^{10}\)

The aim of the redactor of these texts was to provide the Zoroastrians with an interpretation of their religion that would encourage them to remain steadfast in their faith. The emphasis is on the virtues of generosity, truthfulness, wisdom, and kindness: “People have seven things which are best. Good fame, righteousness, nobility, lordship, authority, health and satisfaction. Nobility is this: a man who gives presents to the good

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9 It must be noted that the extant manuscripts that contain wisdom literature in Middle Persian are of much later period, mostly from the fourteen century onwards.

10Boyce, 1968, p. 53.
and the worthy.”¹¹ The majority of the wisdom literature seems to have belonged to the type of compositions that could be used as catechetical instructions. As Shaul Shaked has attempted to demonstrate with regard to Book VI of the Denkard, in spite of the element of relative sophistication of thought, scholastic moralizing and allegorizing, andarz are not a departure from orthodox religion but rather another means of urging the laity towards religion.¹²

The most complete extant record of wisdom literature replete with religious and ethical precepts is Book VI of the Denkard,¹³ which recounts the sayings of the first teachers of Zoroastrian religion as well as some precepts of the Zoroastrian high priests. The book is introduced as presenting what has been done and held by the pious and the word of the Zoroastrian religion, that is the Avesta. Mary Boyce has pointed out that, of the series of wisdom literature that constitutes Book VI of the Denkard, the first and longest set of these probably derives from the Middle Persian translation of the Barish nask¹⁴, a lost book of the Avesta on religious ethics.¹⁵ It is also possible that these may be late gnomic sayings attributed pseudepigraphically to the Sasanian sages.¹⁶

It is in the opening section of Book VI of the Denkard that we find the most quoted Zoroastrian Golden Rule: “that character is best, one who does not do to another that which is not good for himself.”¹⁷ Among the five rules of conduct or virtues the first one

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¹¹ Denkard Book VI, ed. Shaked, 1979,113, p. 45; see also The Pahlavi Rivayat, chap. 62, ed. Williams, 1990, in which several of the sayings correspond to passages in Denkard VI.
¹² Shaked, 1969, p. 199.
¹³ The Denkard is an encyclopedia of Zoroastrian religious knowledge; it consists of nine books, of which the first, second and part of the third book are no longer extant. The contents of the book, which is essentially a compilation, belong to different periods, but the final redaction took place in the ninth century.
¹⁴ Boyce, 1968, p. 52.
¹⁵ Denkard Book VIII, ed. Madan, 1911, p. 685, 11.
¹⁶ See Shaked, 1979, p. xviii.
¹⁷ Denkard Book VI, ed. Shaked, 1979, 2, p. 5.
is: “not to do to others all that which is not good to one’s self.”  

Different lists of the five rules of conduct are given in other Middle Persian texts.

Book III of the Denkard, the most important theological work of the Zoroastrian religion, is another source for the Zoroastrian Golden Rule. In this book the record of moral qualities and faults is laid out more strictly. Among the ten supreme advices of Zarathustra to humans, the fourth is: “In order that to each person comes not misfortune, but happiness, desire for everybody not misfortune, but happiness.” The passage is followed by the admonitions of Akht, a sorcerer and, according to Zoroastrian tradition, a fiery early opponent of the Zoroastrian religion. The book attributes to Akht “of evil knowledge” ten admonitions against the Religion. He is portrayed as taking up the opposite of Zarathustra’s commands: hostility to the gods, friendship with the demons, and the practice of evil works, sorcery, and harm to people. His fourth admonition is: “one must desire for each person not happiness, but misfortune.” These objections mainly function as an introduction to the establishment of the proper Zoroastrian point of view and reflect a situation where Zoroastrianism found itself competing with a number of religions that attempted to convert Iranians to their message. They were also used for instructing and educating Zoroastrians and perhaps for preparing them for actual debates with other beliefs.

The dominant theme of the wisdom literature in Zoroastrianism emphasizes the important significance of the good deed. The life of good thought, word and deed is the logical and determined enactment of Order that brings progress, harmony and happiness. Good thought and good words lead humans to good intentions to bring order into action and reinstate happiness and harmony. This conception is in accord with free will, the need for

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choice, and shouldering responsibility for the consequences of one’s choices. The duty of improving the world is viewed by Zarathustra as a religious obligation, and people who live by it gain salvation. The main thrust of wisdom literature is on the demand for an active effort in the service of religion and the glorification of the deed as merit. “Religion is that, namely: one who causes comfort to every creature”.22

The good deed is its own reward,23 for which reason people are strongly warned against the sinful deed,24 while the honorable deed is of such a character that it can speed up the eschatological transformation.25 The deed paves the way for faith, for “it has been said that thousand men cannot by speaking make one man to believe to the same degree (in such a way) as one man by a deed can make thousand do so.”26 A good deed in a proper sense, that is, without considering its function in the religious system of compensation and the ethical ideals altogether, is easily determined, positively and negatively, by means of the lists of vices and virtues. According to the Denkard the five best things in religion are: “truthfulness, generosity, being possessed of virtue, diligence and advocacy. This truthfulness is best: one who acts (in such a manner) to the creatures of Ohmarzad that the recipient of his action has so much more benefit when he acts like that to him.”27

During the Sasanian period several religious movements competed for adherents with one another and with the official religion. This can be seen from the inscriptions of the Sasanian kings and notably from those of Kerdir,28 the high priest, who states that thanks

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22 Denkard Book VI, ed. Shaked, 1979, 36, p. 17.
27 Denkard Book VI, ed. Shaked, 1979, 23, p. 11.
28 The high priest Kerdir served under five consecutive Sasanian kings in the second half of the third century and left four great inscriptions in Fars, all written in Middle Persian. Three of the inscriptions are at Naqsh-e Rajab and Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis, the fourth at Sar Mashad on an ancient highway between Susa and Persepolis, in which he records the deeds of a powerful career and the multitude of titles he received. See Skjaervø, 1997.
to his efforts under king Bahram II (276-293), Zoroastrianism was promoted in the empire and other religious communities were persecuted. Kerdir’s religious policy is clearly an ideal program, a literary construct, based upon the requirements of the religion. In Sasanian Iran, religion played a central role in the life of society, regulating the entire range of social and political life and official standards of behavior. Religious authorities were present everywhere from the local places of worship to the royal court to watch over the preservation of religious tradition in all aspect of people’s life, and Sasanian kings acted as promoters of the Zoroastrian creed. And it was during the Sasanian period that the first written recording of the Avesta was undertaken to follow and compete with such models as the Torah, the Bible, and the Manichaean books, thereby including the Zoroastrians in the category “people of books.” The establishment of a written scripture was to have a great significance for the later history of the Zoroastrian community, particularly those in Islamic lands.

Similar to many other scriptural traditions, Zoroastrians commentators have come forward to encounter this intellectual and spiritual challenge in order to reconcile the powerful and simple message of the Golden Rule with finer points of doctrine. Adurbad son of Mahraspand, the high priest of Shapur II (309-379) and a key figure in Zoroastrian history is supposed to have been the author of a number of works of wisdom literature. According to the Zoroastrian tradition, Adurbad successfully underwent the ordeal of molten bronze—with the molten metal poured on his chest without any effect—in order to prove the truth of the Zoroastrian faith. Adurbad played an important role in the definition of the Zoroastrian doctrine and his ordeal might be related to matters of

29 Five Pahlavi *andarz* works and at least another one in an Arabic translation (The *Mawa’z Adhurbadh* in Ebn Mskawayh’s *Al-Hekmat al-Khaleda: jawidan kherad*, ed. A. Badawi, Cairo 1952, pp. 26ff.; see Shaked 1979, p. 283) are assigned to him.

30 See *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, ed. de Menasce, 1945, 10.71; p. 119; also the Book of *Arda Wiraz*, 1.1-17, for the translation of the passage see Bailey, 1971, pp. 151-152.

31 According to tradition, he divided the Avesta in 21 sections, and compiled the Zoroastrian book of common prayer, the *Khordeh Avesta* (the “Little Avesta”), and composed in Middle Persian works of moral and theological instruction. His son, Zardusht, carried on the work, authoring a book of catechism, *The Cidag andarz i poryotkeshan* (“Select Counsels of the Ancient Sages”).
scriptural disagreement.\footnote{32 It must be noted that the final version of the scripture seems to have been established during the reign of Khosrow I, A.D. 531-579; see Bailey 1943, p. 173.}

In fulfilling his religious fervor, Adurbad was instrumental in directing and implementing decrees against non-Zoroastrians. Book III of the Denkard attributes ten precepts to Adurbad,\footnote{33 Ed. de Menasce, 1973, chap. 199, pp. 208-210.} which follow a set of evil counsels supposedly pronounced by the prophet Mani (d. ca. 276 CE) to contradict the good sayings of Adurbad. This may well reflect an actual participation of the high priest in the persecution of Manicheans. Mani appeared at a time when the Sasanian kings were striving to establish a firm spiritual basis for their rule by strengthening the clergy and defining the religion. Adurbad’s composition is a lucid and vigorous declaration of faith designed to encourage Iranians to hold on to their faith against alien temptations. In one of his sayings, Adurbad addresses his son: “Do not do unto others what would not be good for yourself.”\footnote{34 The Pahlavi Texts II, ed. Jamasp-Asana, 1913, p.58, 5.}

A collection of questions addressed to Adurbad by a disciple, and Adurbad’s answers to these, is found in the Pahlavi Rivayat. And it is in this collection that he says: “love for people is that he for whom the benefit and well-being of all good men is just as necessary as his own; that which does not seem good for himself he does not do to anyone (else).\footnote{35 The Pahlavi Rivayat, chap. 62.25, ed. Williams, 1990, p. 109; cf. also Denkard VI, ed. Madan, 1911, pp. 588.22, 589.2; ed. Shaked, 1979, E45e, p. 215.}

In another he says: “that one disposition (is) good when one does not do unto others (that) which (is) not goodness unto himself.”\footnote{36 JamaspAsa, 1970, p. 208; Cf. Pahlavi Texts II, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 58, 13-59.}

Parallels between the admonitions attributed to Adurbad and the sayings of Ahiqar in both the frame story and the precepts strengthen the hypothesis that the latter was one of the main sources used by the compiler of Adurbad’s wisdom.\footnote{37 See de Blois’ collection of 24 parallel sayings of Adurbad and Ahiqar, 1984, pp. 41-53.} Zoroastrian theologians
were also familiar with the Aristotelian system of thought and used it extensively. Greek ideas were adopted in the Pahlavi writings and had an important role in the formation of late Zoroastrian thinking in the Sasanian period. The influence of Greek thought on Iranian ideas can be seen specifically in the area of ethics. The main concept of the Aristotelian theory of ethics, the idea of the Mean, finds its echo in the Zoroastrian concept of payman, the right measure. The concept of right measure is characteristic of Zoroastrian ethics and is discussed at length in the Middle Persian texts and is central in wisdom literature. The right measure is the middle way, doing as much as one ought to, neither too much nor too little.

In the Book VII of Denkard, it is said that it was by the strength of the right measure that Jam, the king of Golden Age of mankind, maintained the creation immortal. Once the right measure was lost, immortality also became impossible. In two chapters about “right measure” and “too much and too little” in the Book III of Denkard, a myth is related that people in Jam’s perfect world were lured by the demons and corrupted to the point that they could no longer be immortal. Jam called the demons and asked them who created the world, to which they answered that they created it and would now destroy it. Jam told them that it is not possible to be both a creator and a destroyer and the lie of the demons was thus revealed and refuted, ensuring the immortality of humans. According to this story, the Asn khrad, the wisdom one is born with, had been stolen by the demons, but brought back to humans together with the right measure by Jam, who spent thirteen years in Hell in the disguise of a demon, finally overcoming them and returning to human beings their “desire and profit”.

38 J. De Menasce was the first to point out the similarity between the Zoroastrian discussions of virtues and vices and the schemes that emerge from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics; de Menasce, 1945, p. 30f; 1958, 39ff.
Moderation, entrenched in justice in law and moral behavior in ethics, is the touchstone in Zoroastrian religious philosophy: “moderate is he who plans everything according to the (right) measure, so that more and less should not be therein, for the (right) measure (is) the completeness of everything.” This concept appears to be in conflict with the dualistic system of Zoroastrianism. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian ethical theory was grafted to the traditional Zoroastrian notions of ethics. The authors of Zoroastrian texts mixed the Greek idea with their own worldview while providing the Aristotelian theory with a strong Zoroastrian flavor. The notion is even presented as a purely Iranian one, and indeed it has old Iranian roots, e.g., in the grading and taxonomy of characters not only as good or as extreme or moderate, but also as forward-inclined and backward-inclined. The former type indicates qualities of energy, initiative, and activity, both good and bad, and the latter groups together qualities of restraint and withdrawal. A wise man has virtues of both types in the right measure, allotted to him by the Creator.

Since, as indicated above, the concept of the right measure is an integral part of Zoroastrian wisdom literature, it follows that in the Zoroastrian Golden Rule the emphasis is always placed on moderation and the avoidance of extremes. But what is demanded first and foremost of man is common sense. The common sense view of life is that humans should enjoy the good things of this world while at the same time preparing themselves, through right and reasonable conduct, for eternal life in the other world.

The high ethical implications of the Golden Rule are explicit in Book IX of Denkard, which recapitulates passages on ethics from the lost Avesta: “Those are beneficial who increase for the developer, that is, they shall make goodness for him who would make that goodness which is for others.” Here the Golden Rule is associated with desiring

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44 Denkard Book IV, ed. Madan, 1911, p. 429, 11-12.
46 Lit. provider of much growth.
goodness for all humankind. And “The best prosperity is produced for whoever produces for anyone else what is suitable/good for him.”

The sense of responsibility towards just people is one of the strongest characteristics of Zoroastrian religion as “every just man is the counterpart of the Lord Ohrmazd.”

According to the Menog i khrad, “the greatest deed is to be grateful in the world and to desire good fortune unto all.”

The sage asked the spirit of wisdom: “through how many ways and means of righteousness can people reach the paradise? The spirit of wisdom replied: through charity, truth, gratitude, contentment, goodness towards the victorious and friendliness toward all.”

In Zoroastrianism the Golden Rule evolved from and remained bound to the concept of justice. But what would promote contentment and be just to all? It is the responsibility of the believer to stand for what is regarded as essentially right: “Do not do anything for others which is not good for yourself.” One should do good rather than evil because it is in one’s own self-interest to do so. He who does good deeds, will be rewarded, and he who sins, will be punished.

All that the body has done, the soul will see.

Human beings are bodily and spiritually creatures of the Good Spirit and by their actions have a strong potential for what is good. After they have chosen their side, they expect divine beings to be on their side. The relation between the divine and human is part of a system of reciprocity and both participants have their assigned tasks and are dependant on each other.

CONCLUSION

49 The Supplementary Texts to the yest Nˇyest, ed. Kotwal, 1969, chap. 15.8, p. 59.
50 Ed. Sanjana, 1895, chap. 63.
51 Ed. Sanjana, 1895, chap. 37.1-8, p. 54.
Wisdom and righteousness, piety and justice, are the virtues most prominently associated with a Zoroastrian Golden Rule that is revered as the central pillar of an entire moral edifice. It requires a correct attitude towards one’s fellow humans. It is presented as an indispensable point of doctrine. “If you desire that anybody may not insult you, do not insult anybody.”\textsuperscript{55} “Anybody who digs a well for an enemy will himself fall into it.”\textsuperscript{56} It governs the way the righteous individual treats each and every other person. In other words, the ethical precept in Zoroastrianism is a means for cultivating virtue. Among the five rules of conduct deduced from the Religion, the first one is: “not to do to others all that which is not good to one’s self”.\textsuperscript{57}

In the Zoroastrian religion negatively stated rules are more frequent, delineating boundaries that must not be transgressed. Rules become a principle of justice requiring the virtue of self-restraint in all human beings, while the positively stated expressions of the Golden Rule invite people to be morally active and prescribe generosity. “These two instruments are best for men: to be oneself good and do good to others.”\textsuperscript{58}

Religious beliefs provide a way of looking at the world, and suggest a meaning to one’s existence. The religious vision gives significance and value to human life and some direction toward salvation. The believer chooses to look at the world in this way and dedicates himself to a worthy way of life.

The original religious inspiration and the interpretation, perhaps even the additions and variations introduced at various times, from all of which one can extract the fundamental core of the religious doctrine, must be taken into account. It should provide a vision of the world to which one can dedicate oneself and thereby find the relevance of one’s existence and effort in the total scheme of things. One accepts a faith with all its

\textsuperscript{55} The Pahlavi Texts II, ed. Jamasp-Asana, 1913, p. 66, 92.
\textsuperscript{57} The Supplementary Texts to the ∑TESN∑TESN, ed. Kotwal 1969, chap. 13.29, pp. 48-49.
\textsuperscript{58} Denkard Book VI, ed. Shaked, 1979, 117, p. 49.
contradictions and relies on an authority and standard used in judging beyond oneself or others. Faith is the keyword, defined above all as a compliance with the moral imperative. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said in his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, (1811-1833) “Faith is a profound sense of security in regard to both the present and the future; and this assurance springs from confidence.”

Religion has played an important role in human evolution by strengthening and extending the cohesion provided by the moral systems. A religious tradition, its beliefs, practices and its social structure, lives in the consciousness of its believers. In a world in which two opposing forces of good and bad constantly strive for domination, a human being is perpetually prone to being misguided as to what constitutes right behavior. The ethical qualities instilled by Zarathustra’s teachings have enabled the religion to survive countless ups and downs, persecutions, and hardship. Zoroastrians equate morality with justice, rights, and the welfare of the individual. For Zoroastrians loyalty, respect for authority, and sanctity are moral concepts.

The commitment of Zarathustra to the moral precept is found in the following passage: “Apart from the salvation of one’s soul, it is best to strive for saving other people’s souls”59 which suggests that the Golden Rule is given not only to the individual, but also to the community. To act thus is to bring order into operation and restore wellbeing and harmony. It is a simple and open attitude toward one’s happiness in conjunction with that of others.

However, in Zoroastrian morality there are no extremes of self-sacrifice, no orders to love one’s enemy or to turn the other cheek. “One should take goodness from every one; one should not take evil from any one.”60 The Golden Rule mode of thinking in Zoroastrianism expresses a logic of fairness and consideration based on the recognition that others are like oneself. It gives guidance on practical issues to the community of the faithful. It protects individuals, prevents harm to the person with reciprocity and fairness,

60 *Denkard Book VI*, ed. Shaked, 1979, 22, p. 11.
and applies to all members of the community, men and women. Each individual human
being must take up the responsibility consciously to fight the forces of evil for good to
win, for this created world that is fundamentally good to be purged and transformed, to
be made immortal.

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Jesus, the Golden Rule, and its application

Bruce Chilton

Jesus insisted that we should love, not only our neighbors (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:38-34; Luke 10:27-28), but also our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36), doing to them all as we would be done by (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31).

His principle is simple; the complex relationship among the Gospel texts that state the principle shows that early disciples internalized Jesus’ teaching and interpreted his words in ways that comported with their understandings of Jesus’ significance.¹ Both New Testament and Patristic thinkers came to terms with his challenge, trying both to define what the love by Jesus demanded is, and -- often confronted by hostility, sometimes by lethal threats -- to see whether at least some neighbors, or some enemies, might be excluded some of the time.

That attempt to deflect the force of Jesus’ instruction grew as Christianity came to power, and the counterpoint between Jesus’ plain imperative and theological maneuvers designed to reshape his teaching provides a lesson in the unease of intellect in the face of revelation. The tendency to think oneself out of

¹ A topic I have taken up elsewhere; see Chilton, “Altruism in Christianity,” Altruism in World Religions (edited with Jacob Neusner; Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 53-66. In this essay, I wish to extend some of the interpretative principles set out in the earlier, more exegetical publication, in terms of history and hermeneutics.
an evident moral obligation is by no means unique to Christian discourse, but interpreters in the tradition of the Church have identified the problem in their own heritage in a way that might be productive within comparative study, as well as within Christian theology. The intellectual evasion of moral and/or revealed values is obviously too broad a topic for a short essay, but we can at least analyze this tendency by considering how the Golden Rule has been handled (1) in Christian interpretation, (2) in the most influential of the Gospels, the Gospel according to Matthew, and (3) in recent public discussion.

(1) The Golden Rule in Christian interpretation

Even when the Fathers of the Church attempted to evade the call to universal love that is implicit in the Golden Rule, they understood it was an ethical principle that was to be enacted. Recent studies have revealed the Rule’s simplicity within the diverse Gospel and Patristic texts, demonstrating that Jesus taught the Rule and that his disciples have grappled with its significance from the outset of the process of transmitting his words. Similarly, the questions in regard to what love is and to whom it is owed are thoroughly investigated within Patristic literature. The outcome of a rich discussion is straightforward: ethically, love is for the good that draws one’s actions and one’s being, and – if Jesus is one’s standard – there can be no exclusions in love’s application. Patristic

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exegesis, following the precedent of the Gospel according to Matthew that will be discussed below, deflected the force of Jesus’ teaching by restricting its application, not by denying its meaning.

Yet post-Enlightenment discussion of the Rule has taken a different turn in critical circles, as compared to ancient interpretation. Instead of asking, What is love, and to whom is it directed? The issue has become, How did teaching the Golden Rule make Jesus different from other teachers?

In the attempt to argue that Jesus was unique, modern interpreters have claimed that, while he insisted upon a Golden Rule of doing to others what you wish them to do to you, other teachers “only” required their followers not to do to others what they didn’t want done to them. Examples are frequently cited from sources as diverse as the Torah, Tobit 4:16, the Mahabharata, Confucius, and the Talmud.

The language that modern interpreters have used to refer to all teachings other than Jesus’ is instructive. Two expressions are especially striking. Some scholars call teachings other than Jesus’ “the Silver Rule,” making it valuable indeed, but not quite up to the gold standard. The justification, as offered for example by Ethelbert Stauffer, is that the guidance of not doing what you dislike is a prohibition of bad action rather than an incentive toward good action. As compared to this relegation to silver in relation to Jesus’ gold, a current dismissal more abruptly writes off the teachings of others as “The Negative Form of the

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Golden Rule,” or even as “The Negative Golden Rule.” This curious wording presents Jesus’ teaching as if the switch from incentive to prohibition somehow reversed the force of the imperative.

The relegation and dismissal of expressions of the Rule unlike Jesus’, along with their equivalents, prove bankrupt in exegetical terms. After all, the base text that Jesus cites from Leviticus (19:18), to love your neighbor as yourself, renders the Rule in its positive form, so Jesus can by no means be claimed as the originator of the mandate as an incentive. Once the basic principle of the affective life is stated, as in Leviticus, it is obviously applicable to negative affects, of avoiding what is hurtful, as well as to positive affects, of seeking what is beneficial.

For that reason, the Letter of Aristeas (207), which functions as an introduction to the Septuagint, refers both to avoiding evil on behalf of others as well as to seeking their good (see also Ecclesiasticus 31:15). This combination of prohibition and incentive, good and bad affect, has been shown to be part and parcel of several interpretative traditions, so that it is implausible to claim that Jesus is unique in framing the Golden Rule in positive terms.

The attempt to make a global contrast between Jesus and other teachers has produced a counter-tendency in New Testament exegesis. When Jesus was

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4 The fallacy was exposed long ago in an article by George Brockwell King that unfortunately has not been accorded the attention it deserves; “The ‘Negative’ Golden Rule,” *The Journal of Religion* 8.2 (1928) 268-279.
asked about the first commandment of all, he replied in the words of the *Shema* 'Yisrael, that you are to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30). That is the basic confession of Judaism that Jesus embraced, even if some rabbis today might legitimately question Jesus’ orthodoxy on other grounds.\(^5\) The second injunction Jesus cited (Mark 12:31), to love one’s neighbor as oneself, also draws from the Torah (as we have already seen). When Jesus’ teaching is described atomistically, in terms of its literal content point by point, it all but disappears against the background of contemporary ideas.

The two modern approaches, the one to contrast Jesus as much as possible with other teachers, and the other to equate him as much as possible with his environment, correspond to opposing claims about Jesus since the Enlightenment. One insists he is unique, and only understandable by faith, in the manner of John Henry Newman during the nineteenth century and Pope Benedict XVI today.\(^6\) The other insists he is fully understandable as a product of his time, in the manner of Thomas Jefferson, who is named as the equivalent of its patron saint by “the Jesus Seminar” in its principal publication.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth. From the baptism in the Jordan to the transfiguration* (translated by Adrian J. Walker; New York: Doubleday, 2007).

In the case of the Golden Rule, neither view of Jesus in history proves viable. The Rule articulates a principle of the Torah, its interpretation, and of wider Near Eastern culture that existed for centuries prior to Jesus. Yet at the same time the Rule as expressed by Jesus is not a simple repetition of earlier statements. In between “unique” and “routine,” we discover Jesus in history in the same way that we discover other historical figures – neither completely unprecedented nor banal, but distinctive and influential.

Love of God and love of neighbor were basic principles embedded in the Torah. Jesus’ innovation lay in his claim that the two were indivisible. Love of God was love of neighbor, and vice versa. Because, according to Jesus, God’s love was transforming the world – thereby manifesting “the kingdom of God” (malkhutha’ d’Elaha’) in Jesus’ Aramaic language – every person, friendly or not, needs to be seen in the context of God’s presence. That is the basis of Jesus’ distinctive and challenging ethic of love in the midst of persecution. He linked the Rule to the transformed society the prophets had predicted. He promised that suffering could achieve transcendence, provided people are seen neither as threatening strangers, nor even as allies of convenience, but as mirrors of God’s presence in the world. Because the neighbor reflects divine presence among us, loving that neighbor was tantamount to loving God in Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus’ vision of God in the midst of humanity marks his articulation of the Rule as distinctive. He believed he saw God at work changing the world, and he

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conveyed what he saw to his followers in the words and the practices that secured his reputation as a sage, a rabbi in the language of his time. Seeing transformation involves willingness to be transformed, so that the kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching is an ethical imperative as well as an assurance of faith. The Golden Rule conveys that ethical imperative, putting it into words.

The promise of God’s kingdom was that it should come, Jesus said, “in strength” (Mark 9:1) – that is both with the force of revelation and as a matter of action. The term for “strength” in Greek is *dunamis*, which appears over a hundred times in the New Testament, with surprising frequency in a work written by groups well away from political power or influence. That brings us to the Aramaic word *taqpha’*, used before, during, and after Jesus’ time to speak of the effective strength of revelation. He used that word to claim that love of neighbor effects the love of God and transforms the world. The disciples of Jesus, whose interpretations are embodied in the New Testament, as well as the Fathers of the Church, appreciated that ethics and revelation were indistinguishable, and that a dedication to the kingdom of God committed them to transformation. In the end they realized, as Jesus himself barely intuited, that the kingdom relativized even the Torah.

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When we place Jesus within the context of his time and of the movement that derived from him, he does not disappear into his background. Neither does he appear alien within that setting. Rather, properly comparative and historical attention reveals him as a principal figure in generating a new religious vision, which saw God and humanity reflected in one another, and as transforming the world with the strength of that revelation.

(2) The Golden Rule in the Gospel according to Matthew

The Gospel “according to Matthew” (its title in antiquity) owes its position as the first book in the New Testament to its widespread usage in the ancient Church, as is shown by frequent references to this Gospel among the Fathers and within Gnostic writings. Understanding its perspective on Jesus’ significance and its presentation of the Golden Rule will therefore help to explain how the early Church interpreted the Rule.¹⁰

This Gospel seems to owe its title to its identification of a tax agent and disciple by that name (Matthew 9:9), although he is called Levi in Mark (2:14) and Luke (5:27). Yet the name “Matthew” does appear in all three Synoptic Gospels as among the Twelve (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15): the first

Gospel’s innovation lies not in the name, but in its association of that name with the disciple who was or had been a tax agent.

The first Gospel shows a keen interest in how Jesus’ life and work fulfills prophecies in the Scriptures of Israel, in the final judgment which is to accompany the end of the world, in Jesus’ teaching of angelology, and in the emerging custom of celibacy among believers (see, for example, Matthew 19:1-12, a passage with uniquely Matthean additions as compared to Mark, the earlier text). All of these features suggest a Syrian provenience, and particularly an origin in Damascus (although Antioch has also been suggested), where there were disciples of Jesus from shortly after the resurrection, and where Jewish communities thrived. Among them, the Essenes also featured prominently, and some distinguishing characteristics of Matthew’s Gospel echo features of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Chapter 23 of the Gospel nonetheless reflects the growing tension with many Jewish communities that did not recognize Jesus as son of God and messiah, as well as the growing importance of the institution of the synagogue in the period after 70 C.E., when the Romans destroyed the Temple. The Roman arson finds its allusion in Matthew 22:7. That reference, together with the evidence of the growing power of the Pharisees and the influence of synagogues, has suggested to scholars that the Gospel should be dated around 80 CE.

Considerable overlap with the Gospel according to Mark has led many scholars to suppose that Mark constituted a source of Matthew, but the shared
material need not all have been in written form, since oral instruction was vital within the primitive Church. Similarly, the presence of some 200 verses, for the most part sayings of Jesus, in both Matthew and Luke has prompted the hypothesis of a written document called “Q,” named after the German term Quelle (“source”), but sayings need have been no more formalized in writing than the teachings of Peter, James (the brother of Jesus), and Barnabas, which also seem to have influenced the composition of Matthew.

But the first Gospel is no mere patchwork of sources. Its structure is clearly marked through its preface, a unique presentation of Jesus’ birth from the perspective of Scriptural fulfillment (chapters 1-2), and through five clearly marked sections that tie together narrative and discourse (including the famous and uniquely Matthean Sermon on the Mount) as Jesus progresses from his baptism and preaching in Galilee (section one, chapters 3-4), through his healings, both personally and by means of the Twelve (section two, chapter 8-10), into an emphasis upon his own persona (section three chapters 11-13), until he explicitly proclaims his authority to his followers (section four, chapters 14-17), and clashes with the authorities in Jerusalem (section five, chapters 19-25). Jesus’ passage through death to resurrection (chapters 26-28) is the capstone of the Gospel, which is more strongly marked by narrative than by discourse, as in the five central sections.

The fivefold structure of the middle section recalls the five books of Moses. This impression is strengthened by the explicit contrast between Jesus’
rules for his people and those given by Moses in the first discourse (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Just as Moses went up on the mountain to give instruction to God’s people (Deuteronomy 8:1–2), so Jesus repeatedly in Matthew ascends a mountain to instruct God’s people and to manifest his divine authority (Matthew 4:8; 5:1; 14:23; 15:29, 39; 17:1; 28:19–20). In Jesus’ sketch of this people’s responsibility to God in the first Gospel there is a distinctive emphasis on true righteousness, in contrast to that of the Pharisaic tradition (3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). That theme is most fully developed in a discourse section that does not fit the pattern sketched above in our outline, and seems to have been added to earlier traditions of the Gospel as the hostility between Matthew’s community and the Pharisees (or Rabbis) intensified (Matthew 23). This hostility comes to its most radical expression when the Jewish people willingly call down responsibility for shedding Jesus’ blood on themselves and their children, and this after Pilate -- the only person with authority to order the execution -- has washed his hands of guilt (Matthew 27:24-25). The climax of the Gospel is reached at the close, when the eleven disciples (after Judas delivered Jesus to the authorities and then killed himself) are commanded to make disciples of all nations by baptism “in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit,” and by teaching them to keep Jesus’ commandments (28:19-20).

Matthew’s structure reflects a fraught relationship with Judaism, and therefore with Jews, who are all but formally excluded from the horizon of the
51, 57; 12:10; 18:3-19:22). Their close association with the execution of Jesus makes it plain that his activity in the Temple figured centrally in his condemnation before Pilate.

disciples to teach, and attempts to influence the conduct of worship in the
Temple. In all of those aspects, Jesus’ portrait in the Gospels comports well with
a recognized pattern of teaching concerning purity in early Judaism, although
the substance of his teaching was distinctive (and, for many, controversial).
Scribes appear both in a local context (Matthew 5:20; 7:29; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 17:10;
Mark 1:22; 2:6, 16; 7:5; Luke 5:21, 30; 6:7), even as a part of Jesus’ movement
(Matthew 8:19; 13:52; Mark 12:32, 34; Luke 20:39), and during the final
confrontation in Jerusalem (Matthew 16:21; 20:18; 21:15; [26:3,] 57; 27:41; Mark
46; 22:2, 66; 23:10). They are probably to be identified with references to
“lawyers” in the Gospels (Matthew 22:35; Luke 7:30; 10:25; 11:45, 46, 52; 14:3),
and the presence of “scribes” among both local and high-priestly elites reinforces
the impression that the category concerns more a function than a distinctive
teaching, as in the case of the Essenes or the Pharisees, or a special interest, as in
the case of the Sadducees.

The social history of Christianity tended to cast scribes, Pharisees, and
lawyers into a single category of persecutors and hypocrites, like the “Jews”
themselves, and that influence is evident in the present text of the Gospels (cf.
Matthew 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; Mark 3:6, 22; 7:1, 5; Luke 6:7; 11:45, 46,
52, 53, 54; 15:2). The Matthean Jews in particular are liars in respect of the
resurrection (28:15), and willful murderers who implicate their own children in
the crucifixion (27:25). That is the most prejudicial charge in all of the Gospels,
but it is not unlike Mark's condescending and unique claim that “all the Jews” hold to practices of washing “cups and pots and copper vessels” (7:3, 4), or Luke's unique scene of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth by his own people (4:16-30), or John’s uniquely anachronistic claim that “the Jews” excluded the followers of Jesus from synagogues during his lifetime (9:22; 12:42, cf. 16:2). *The Gospel according to Thomas* has Jesus himself ironically ask the disciples whether they have become as obtuse as the Jews, in that they must ask concerning Jesus’ identity, when they ought simply to recognize it (l. 43). Within all five sources, which are of primary importance in the study of Jesus, Judaism and the Jews appear more as a foil for Jesus than as the matrix of his movement. But the realities of a radically pluralized Judaism in which Jesus was a vigorous participant also shine through the texts as they may be read today.

In order to understand the portrayal of Jews within the New Testament, the perspective on Judaism within the documents needs to be appreciated. Paul believed that the example of Abraham showed that a completely new definition of Israel had emerged with the coming of Jesus. He says that when believers hear with faith, they are “just as Abraham, who believed in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Galatians 3:6). Paul attributes to Abraham the role of the principal patriarch of Judaism, but he argues that Abraham's faith, not his obedience to the law, made him righteous in the sight of God (Galatians 3:7). Descent from Abraham, therefore, was a matter of belief, not a matter of genealogy. Paul therefore argued that Scripture attests a radically new definition
of Israel, which challenges the received understanding of both Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. Although this new definition did not deny the role of Judaism within Israel (see Romans 9-11, above all), for Paul “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) signaled a departure from conventional understandings of Judaism.

Although Paul was radical, and more often than not isolated, in his new definition of Israel, even documents within the New Testament that do not formally share his theology as he formulated it nonetheless agree with his theological evaluation of Israel. In Matthews’s Gospel, although scribes, Pharisees, and the Jewish people are severely (and even racially, as we have seen) criticized for complicity in the death of Jesus, Jesus commands his followers to do what Jewish leaders command, because they “sit on Moses’ seat” (Matthew 23:2-3) This apparent paradox is resolved when it is kept in mind that, for Matthew, the Torah remains a regulative principle -- but as interpreted according to Torah’s fulfillment in Christ. The ambivalence between Judaism as it was designed to be and Judaism as it had become reaches deep into the characterization of Jesus’ in this Gospel.

The Sermon on the Mount, unique to Matthew’s Gospel, lies on the fault line of Matthean ambivalence toward Judaism, and this is just where the Golden Rule appears (7:12), near the close of the Sermon (at the end of chapter seven). By the time Jesus pronounces the Golden Rule in Matthew, he has already characterized Judaism as teaching its opposite, hatred (Matthew 5:43-48):
You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and you shall hate your enemy. Yet I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so you might become sons of your father in heavens. Because he makes his sun dawn upon evil people and good people, and makes rain upon just and unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the customs-agents do the same? And if you greet only your fellows, what do you do that goes beyond? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, then, shall be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.

The pattern of antithesis (“You have heard that it was said.... Yet I say to you”) has been well established early in the Sermon on the Mount (from Matthew 5:21). Ordinarily, antithetical contrast relates a statement in the Hebrew Bible to Jesus’ teaching. In this case, however, no biblical passage corresponds to the commandment to hate one’s enemies. Perhaps the imperative in the Community Rule from Qumran, to “hate all the sons of darkness” (1QS 1:10), is in mind; in that case, the environment of Damascus, with which the Dead Sea covenanters cultivated ties, would help explain the expression in Matthew. But whatever the understanding of exactly why this position is attributed to Judaism, the fact remains that a global imperative of hatred is projected on to the religion from which Christianity was in the process of separating at the time.

Matthew brings to clearest expression a conviction that emerges both in the New Testament and in Patristic literature: that the distinction of Christianity
from Judaism reveals that only Christian faith, and not its Judaic prototype, conforms to the divine imperative to love. Yet it would be artificial to imagine that this claim, often associated with Christian supersessionism, is a mere artifact of Matthean theology. As a matter of fact, all the essentials of the assertion in Matthew are present in the counterpart in Luke to the Matthean passage (Luke 6:27-36, an earlier form of “Q,” albeit in a Gospel from about a decade later than Matthew):

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, act well with those who hate you, bless those who accuse you, pray concerning those who revile you. To the one who hits you on the cheek, furnish the other also. And from the one who takes your garment, do not forbid the tunic! Give to the one who asks you, and do not demand from the one who takes what is yours. And just as you want men to do to you, do to them similarly. And if you love those who love you, what sort of grace is that for you? Because even the sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do you good, what sort of grace is that to you? Even the sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what sort of grace is that to you? Even sinners lend so that they receive the equivalent back. Except: love your enemies and do good and lend -- anticipating nothing -- and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of most high, because he is fine to the ungrateful and evil. Become compassionate, just as your father is also compassionate.
Here, in a passage that overlaps with Matthew in a way that suggests we are dealing with “Q,” source that reaches back to 35 C.E., the contrast is set up between those who accept the ambit of the Golden Rule, and “sinners” whose attitude puts them outside the circle of grace established by the Rule. Although the Sermon on the Mount within its Matthen context is probably the clearest expression of the hermeneutic of exclusion in the New Testament, it expresses a tendency with ample resonance both within Christianity and outside it.

(3) The Gold rule in recent public discussion

Since 1976, when Jimmy Carter’s Evangelical faith became a campaign issue, candidates’ religious orientations have factored in political debate. When George W. Bush cited Jesus Christ as his favorite political philosopher during the campaign of 2000, his statement represented a crescendo of devout rhetoric, but by no means an aberration. The relationship between Jesus and politics has been taken up again in 2008, and Democratic politicians have been advertising faith-based credentials that they once kept lit under a bushel — if they had been ignited at all. In this environment, it is helpful to have the careful, close reading offered by Tod Lindberg, not a theologian but a Hoover Institution research fellow.¹²

Mercifully, Lindberg avoids equating Jesus with progressive or conservative policies, recognizing the anachronism involved in such claims. But

he does identify Jesus not as a progressive, but as *the progressive* (italics his): the force in Western politics who made progress possible by asserting the full equality of men and women. The closest and most effective of Lindberg’s readings involves the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Through the careful, literal attention Mr. Lindberg pays to the text, he is able clearly to identity two related principles that are often missing from popular conversation and even from scholarly discussion of the Gospels’ political perspective.

The first of these insights is that the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes (in Matthew 5:3-11), is built around a strict injunction to righteousness. In speaking of the persecution his disciples should expect, Jesus does not endorse that outcome, but he does accommodate to it. To be persecuted should be accepted as a badge of honor, he teaches, if it comes for righteousness’ sake (Matthew 5:10-12). The second of Lindberg’s central observations is that the way in which Jesus commends the Law of Moses, the Torah, involves a key qualification of the conventional reading: in Matthew, Jesus says the Law will not pass until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18). Though that has been taken to suggest that the Law is fixed in its content, Jesus truly believed in a prophetic fulfillment that would bring all the peoples of the world to recognize the God of Israel. That fulfillment necessitated a radical transformation of the Law in Jesus’ mind as in the minds of Prophets before him, so as it enable people entirely unrelated by genealogy or custom to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to inherit all the promises of the covenant with the patriarchs.
Both principles -- the preeminent importance of righteousness and the transcendence of Law -- are inherent in Jesus’ overall religious vision of the significance of human life, and correspond evocatively to current concerns for justice, especially as they deal with economic repression and racism. But a basic correction needs to be introduced into Lindberg’s careful reading. Although he works closely with the texts involved, he lacks proper attention to context. He acknowledges that Jesus approach is not political at base, and yet he lists “equality” among Jesus’ concerns, as though Jesus lived in the eighteenth-century Europe, rather than first-century Palestine. Though political in consequence, the basis of Jesus’ position was not an Enlightenment concern with the nature of political authority, but the vision of Israel’s prophets promising that a super-political malkhutha’ d’Elaha’, in which divine justice would “roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

The tendency to short-circuit the cultural development between Jesus’ time and later periods also appears in Lindberg’s repeated treatment of the text of Matthew’s Gospel as a direct statement of Jesus’ political position, rather than one mediated by the community of Matthew some fifty years after Jesus’ death. The unfortunate result is that the disagreements between Matthew’s community and its surrounding Jewish community are flattened into a superficial reading of Jesus’ teaching. At one point, Mr. Lindberg finds himself saying, on the basis of Matthew 5:43, that the Hebrew Scriptures explicitly instructed people to hate their enemies. Of course that is not the case, as has been explicitly recognized by
scholars for more than half a century, especially as a result of the detailed
ccontributions of Krister Stendahl.\textsuperscript{13}

Although this deficiency in attending to context mars the book, it also
signals an underlying problem in the wider contemporary debate concerning the
relationship between politics and religion. If even careful, close readers are going
to take their terms of reference from the broad-spectrum handbooks that
Lindberg cites -- \textit{Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary}, based upon a work
published in 1939, and the more recent but still recycled \textit{Backgrounds of Early
Christianity} published by Eerdmans\textsuperscript{14} -- without reference to specific scholarship,
we are surely in trouble. Whether you see Jesus’ political influence as positive or
negative, a flat reading of the Gospels will take you as far from a historically
accurate assessment of Christianity as the assumption of a flat earth would take
you from drawing an accurate map of the earth. In the world we live in, the
religious maps we use are every bit as important as our geographical ones. And
in the case of the Golden Rule, the belief that a spiritual chasm separates
Christianity from all other religions is as deceptive as the medieval belief that a
physical abyss prevented Europe from exploration westward. Where the study
of religion is concerned, the only abyss to fear is the on in which practitioners

\textsuperscript{13} See \textit{The School of St. Matthew and its Use of the Old Testament} (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1968).
\textsuperscript{14} W. E. Vine, \textit{Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary} (London: Thomas Nelson, 1996); \textit{Backgrounds of
early Christianity} (edited by Everett Ferguson; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003).
isolate themselves in a refusal to consider the faith and the ethical motivations of others.
"The Golden Rule as the Law of Nature, from Origen to Martin Luther".
Olivier du ROY (Paris)

Abstract: This paper seeks to explain how Origen was the first to comment on Romans 2:14 (these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves...) in relation to Matthew 7:12 (all things whatsoever ye would that men...), thereby suggesting that the Golden Rule is Natural Law. All the Church Fathers adopted this perspective (St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, etc.). Likewise, all the theologians of the Middle Ages, up to Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas (for them, it was the synderesis (bonum est faciendum) that was the first Natural Law. Martin Luther was the key figure who later gave renewed impulse to the Golden Rule, which explains why it spread so dramatically throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in all the countries where the Reform took root, and especially in England.

This paper is part of a larger study into the Golden Rule in all religions and especially into the history of morals in the West.

The first researcher to highlight this patristic doctrine, which makes the Golden Rule the very substance of Natural Law, was Hans Reiner in 1948, followed by two articles in 1955. He also saw clearly that it was the connection attested by Justin (second century) and Origen (beginning of the third century) between Matthew 7:12 and Romans 2:14-15 which was to structure this doctrine and make it one that would be bequeathed to the whole patristic tradition, and thence to medieval theology.

1. History

The doctrine, explicating Natural Law by means of the Golden Rule, is widespread throughout the whole Christian tradition. However, its precise origins are not always conscious: the authority of Augustine in the West and of Basil and John Chrysostom in the East, who are the most cited in the late patristic period or Middle Ages, obscures older sources. The direct influence of Origen may perhaps only be seen during the twelfth century in Abelard (1133-1137) and Peter Lombard (1140), in their Commentaries of the Epistle of the Romans: Abelard’s makes reference to Origen, and Peter Lombard’s is considered to be largely a gloss of Origen’s.

The story begins very early in the Christian tradition: as early as the second century. The first manifestation of this doctrine is to be found in Justin the apologist, around 150, in Rome. It is

\[1 \text{ Romans 2:14: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another”.}
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\[2 \text{ JUSTIN, Dialogue with Tryphon, 93 : “For [God] sets before every race of mankind that which is always and universally just, as well as all righteousness; and every race knows that adultery, and fornication, and such like, are sinful; and though they all homicide and commit such practises, yet they do not escape from the knowledge that they act unrighteously whenever they so do, with the exception of those who are possessed with an unclean spirit, and who have been debased by education, by wicked customs, and by sinful institutions, and who have lost, or rather quenched and put under, their natural ideas. For we may see that such persons are unwilling to submit to the same things which they inflict upon others, and reproach each other with hostile consciences for the acts which they perpetrate. And hence I think that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ spoke well when He summed up all righteousness and piety in two commandments. They are these: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself. (…) And the man who loves his neighbour as himself will wish for him the same good things that he wishes for himself, and no man will} \]
next found in Irenaeus of Lyon\(^3\) between 180 and 200. And, around 230, there is a very elaborate account in Origen of Alexandria:

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\text{“It is certain that the Gentiles who do not have the law are not being said to do naturally the things of the law in respect of the Sabbath days, the new moon celebrations, or the sacrifices written about in the law. For it was not that law which is said to be written in the heart of the Gentiles. The reference is instead to what they are able to perceive by nature (\textit{quod sentire naturaliter possunt}), for instance that they should not commit murder or adultery, they ought not steal, they should honour father and mother, and the like. (…)And yet it seems to me that the things which are said to be written in their heart agree with the evangelical laws, where everything is ascribed to natural justice (\textit{ad naturalem aequitatem}). For what could be nearer to the natural moral senses (naturalibus sensibus) than that those things men do not want done to themselves, they should not do to others (\textit{quae nolunt sibi fieri homines, haec ne faciant aliis}). Natural law (\textit{lex naturalis}) is able to agree with the law of Moses according to the spirit but not according to the letter.”\(^4\)}

In under 80 years, this doctrine became the common good of the Christian tradition, from the Gauls to Alexandria. Nothing of the type is announced in the Gospels, nor directly in the apostolic writings: it appears out of the connection between Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31 (the Golden Rule) and a passage from the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 2:14). This means that, faced with pervasive paganism and with the desire to affirm Christian moral value, Christian thinking very quickly made the connection between the gospel maxim of the Golden Rule and this law which Paul declares was not absent among the pagans. What is this law which the pagans have for themselves? “What men do not want done to themselves, they should not do to others”. For Justin, for Irenaeus as for Origen, this is the natural law of which Saint Paul speaks.

From that point on, this doctrine of natural law, the content of which is expressed by the Golden Rule, would spread throughout the whole of the patristic period. It can be traced in the Pseudo-Clementines\(^5\) probably of Ebionite origin (end of second-third centuries) then in Ephrem the Syrian in the fourth century. In Lactantius\(^6\), in Africa, in the fourth century, then

\[\text{\textbf{wish evil things for himself. Accordingly, he who loves his neighbour would pray and labour that his neighbour may be possessed of the same benefits as himself. Now nothing else is neighbour to man than that similarly-affectioned and reasonable being-man “.}}\]

\(^3\) IRENAEUS, Adversus Haereses, Book.4, XIII,1 “And that the Lord did not abrogate the natural [precepts] of the law, by which man is justified, which also those who were justified by faith, and who pleased God, did observe previous to the giving of the law, but that He extended and fulfilled them,… ” Book.4,XV ,1. “They (the Jews) had therefore a law, a course of discipline, and a prophecy of future things. For God at the first, indeed, warning them by means of natural precepts, which from the beginning He had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the Decalogue (which, if any one does not observe, he has no salvation), did then demand nothing more of them. ” Book.4,XIII,3 “But the righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls, that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbour. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates (correptoriis literis), because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves. But when this righteousness and love to God had passed into oblivion, and became extinct in Egypt, God did necessarily, because of His great goodwill to men, reveal Himself by a voice,… ”


\(^6\) LACTANTIUS, Epitome, 55,3 : “It ’tis bitter unto thee to bear an injury and he that does it seems unjust in thy account ; remove that by way of supposition to another person which thou feelest in thy self, and that to thy own person which thou judgest of another, and you wilt presently understand that thou thyself dost as much unjustly in injuring of another, as another hurting thee ”. And also: Divinae Institutiones, 6,23 : “We should therefore
in Basil in Cappadocia and in John Chrysostom in Constantinople at the same time. In the words of this great preacher, who, well before Kant, announced the autonomy of moral law in man:

“Wherefore Christ, for the purpose of declaring this, and shewing that He was not introducing a strange law, or one which surpassed our nature, but that which He had of old deposited beforehand in our conscience, after pronouncing those numerous Beatiudes, thus speaks; “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (Math., 7,12) “Many words,” saith He, “are not necessary, nor laws of great length, nor a diversity of instruction. Let thine own will be the law. Dost thou wish to receive kindness? Be kind to another. Dost thou wish to receive mercy? Show mercy to thy neighbour. Dost thou wish to be applauded? Applaud another. Dost thou wish to be beloved? Exercise love. Dost thou wish to enjoy the first rank? First concede that place to another. Become thyself the judge, thyself the lawgiver of thine own life. And again, “Do not to another what thou hatest.” (Tob., 4,16). By the latter precept, he would induce to a departure from iniquity; by the former, to the exercise of virtue. “Do not do to another,” he saith, “what thou hatest.” Dost thou hate to be insulted? Do not insult another. Dost thou hate to be envied? Envy not another. Dost thou hate to be deceived? Do not deceive another. And, in a word, in all things, if we hold fast these two precepts, we shall not need any other instruction. For the knowledge of virtue He hath implanted in our nature; but the practice of it and the correction He hath entrusted to our moral choice.”

It reappears in Jerome and in Prosper of Gaza in Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries. In Italy in Ambrosiaster, in Saint Ambrose of Milan and Gaudentius of Brescia in the fourth and fifth centuries. In Africa in Saint Augustine, then in Aquitaine in Prosper in the fifth century. In Rome, Popes Gregory the Great (sixth century) and Nicholas I (ninth century) adopted the same doctrine. Augustine’s amazing sermon reveals his eloquence, and the Christian people can be seen to applaud and respond to his exhortations:

“Anyone at all when questioned about what is just can easily give the right answer, as long as he or she is not an interested party!

And this is not surprising, for by the hand of our Fashioner truth has written in our very hearts the precept, Do not do to another what you would not want anyone to do to you (Tob.,4,16). Even before the law was given no one was allowed to be ignorant of it, for even those to whom the law had not been revealed were held liable to judgment by this standard. (…) Because men and women were so avid for external things that they had become estranged from themselves, a written law was given. This did not imply that its provisions were not already inscribed in human hearts; but you, mortal, were a deserter from your heart, and so you are arrested by him who is present everywhere, and you are called back within yourself. (…)

After all, who taught you to resent it if another man makes approaches to your wife?
Who taught you to hope that you will not be robbed?
Who taught you to be indignant if you suffer some injury?

Plenty of other examples can be given, relating to public or private issues. There are many such points on which, if people are questioned, they will unhesitatingly reply that they do not want to suffer such treatment.

Come now, tell me: if you do not want to be treated like that, do you think you are the only person who matters? (…) Well then, do not do to another what you would not want anyone to do to you. You judge something to be bad from the fact that you do not want to have it done to you; and it is the secret inner law, written in your very heart, that has taught you to view it so.

think of our selves in other men, and others in our selves. Because the all justice is: not to do unto others what we would not have done unto us.”

8 AMBROSE OF MILAN, De fuga saeculi, 3,15, C.S.E.L.,32,2,p.175.
When you behaved toward someone else like that, he or she cried out under your ill-treatment; and when you endure the same at the hands of another, are you not driven back to your own heart?

Is theft a good thing? No? I ask you: is adultery a good thing? Everyone shouts, "No!" Is homicide good? They all shout their detestation of it. The unanimous reply is, "No!" If you are not yet persuaded on this subject, imagine that someone comes trying to get his hands on your things. I hope you enjoy it! Then come back and give me your answer. Clearly, then, everyone questioned about such actions will attest that they are not good.

(…) suppose a traveller arrives in your region. He has no roof over his head, yet no one takes him in. He protests that this is an inhuman city, that he could more easily have found a place to stay among savages. He is keenly aware of the injustice, because he is the victim of it. You perhaps are insensitive to it; but you should imagine yourself in the same situation, on a journey, and ask yourself how you would resent it if someone refused to give you what you are unwilling to give to that traveller in your own country.

I put it to you, all of you: are these things true? "Yes, they are true," you say. Is this a just appraisal? "Yes," you say, "just it is." 9

Later, following somewhat of an eclipse in the sixth and seventh centuries, Western tradition takes up the baton again with the Carolingian empire and the development of theology in the monastic and episcopal schools. In the ninth and tenth centuries, this assimilation of the Golden Rule to natural law can be rediscovered in Smaragde, Strabo, Haymo of Auxerre and Atto of Vercelli. In the eleventh century, in Anselm of Canterbury. The twelfth century is the richest with Anselm of Laon, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Champeaux, Hugh of Saint-Victor, Abelard, Pierre Lombard, Odo of Ourscamp, Pierre of Poitiers and finally the great jurist Gratian, along with all his commentators, who places the evangelical Golden Rule at the beginning of his Decretum as the first principle of natural law.

The twelfth century and the beginnings of scholasticism maintain this tradition with William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, John of la Rochelle, Saint Bonaventure, Robert Grosseteste, Matthew of Aquasparta. After suffering at the hands of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinus, who vigorously disparaged this interpersonal conception of natural law in favour of a philosophy of Good, it makes a reappearance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in Duns Scotus, Nicholas of Lyra, John Gerson, Henry Herp, Marcilio Ficino. Erasmus still holds to it in the sixteenth century, where it would be taken up by Luther and all the great reformers (Calvin, Melanchton, Bucer, Zwingli, John Cameron, amongst others). In Luther, we have found more than 40 texts, in all periods in his life and preaching 10. His first known sermon (1510-1512) is devoted to it 11. The following is an extract from his Lectures on Romans (1514-1515):

"This law is impressed upon all, Jews as well as Gentiles; and all are therefore bound to obey it. In this sense our Lord says in Matth.7,12: 'All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also unto them; for this is the law and the prophets'. The whole law handed down to us is, 9 AUGUSTIN, *Enarr. in Psalm. 57.1*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century*, N.Y., New City Press, 2001, Part II, vol.17, p.120-121.

10 Martin LUTHER, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520), 7th. Commandment, "And it fights not only against theft and robbery, but against all stinting in temporal goods which men may practice toward one another: such as greed, usury, overcharging and plating wares that sell as solid, counterfeit wares, short measures and weights, and who could tell all the ready, novel, clever tricks, which multiply daily in every trade, by which every one seeks his own gain through the other's loss, and forgets the rule which says: 'What ye wish that others do to you, that do ye also to them.' If every one kept this rule before his eyes in his trade, business, and dealings with his neighbour, he would readily find how he ought to buy and sell, take and give, lend and give for nothing, promise and keep his promise, and the like". 11 *Sermo ex autographo Lutheri quod reperiebatur in Monasterio Augustinen: Erffurdiae*, WA.,t.4, p.591,11-22.
therefore, **nothing else than this natural law** which everyone knows and on account of which no one is without excuse”¹².

From that point on, seventeenth-century England extends this tradition with the Reverend Thomas Jackson¹³, the first to call our maxim the *Golden Rule*, in 1615, Benjamin Camfield¹⁴ in the first treatise ever written on the Golden Rule, in 1671, in Cumberland¹⁵, one of the Cambridge Platonists, in George Boraston¹⁶, in John Goodman (the author of the second treatise known on the Golden Rule), in John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury. In France, Bossuet calls it the *Loi de l’équité naturelle* [the Law of natural equity].

As long as we remain within the Christian tradition, and without interrogating it too closely, the Golden Rule unquestionably remains the first principle of natural law, except in the interlude represented by the Aristotelian critique of Albert the Great and Saint Thomas, who replace it with the *synderesis*. But then there came the time of secularization and independence of thinking regarding the foundations of rights and the law. For Grotius and Pufendorf, the Golden Rule retains a major role, but it is no longer the ultimate basis of natural law and social life. However, Thomasius and Wolff in the eighteenth century restore its status.

Locke and Leibniz (in a more nuanced fashion) challenge the possibility of the rule’s being a primary, self-evident principle. But the problematic has clearly changed and the shift is now towards an attempt at an epistemic basis of natural law. Which takes us straight to Kant and to his well-known devaluation of the maxim: this trivial maxim that, according to him, cannot be compared to his categorical imperative. On this point he would be contradicted by Schopenhauer and Feuerbach. In addition, Voltaire, drawing on the writings of Confucius brought back from China by the Jesuits, would return the Golden Rule to the heart of Natural Law:

“The only author of nature may have made the eternal laws of nature. The single fundamental and immutable law for men is the following: ‘Treat others as you would be treated’. This law is from nature itself: it cannot be torn from the heart of man”¹⁷.

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¹⁴ “For, to say the truth of it, this precept of our Blessed Saviour is no more than a plain Law of Nature, obliterated by evil habits and custom, revived and brought to light again by Christ. A Law of Nature, I say, it is undoubtedly, whereof we may find clear foot-steps among the Heathens, and which takes hold immediately on the conscience of every one that duly considereth of it”(Benjamin CAMFIELD, *The comprehensive Rule of Righteousness*, sect.II, p.19, William Leach, 1671).


¹⁶ “A Law which is deduced from that common natural inclination implanted in every one by God himself; from whence it is, that every Man doth naturally seek his own preservation, and welfare: That then which is naturally, and sufficiently grounded in every Man, is laid there as a pattern for the exercise of Charity and Justice towards all other Men: For by this Native Law, we are obliged to deal with others, as we had exchanged Persons, and Circumstances with them, and they were in ours” (George BORASTON, *The Royal Law: or the Golden Rule of Justice and Charity*, London, 1684, p.5).

Here, it would simply not be feasible to list every example of how thinking has persisted to the present day in regarding the Golden Rule as an expression of Natural law: in everyday religious teaching, in lay catechism, and even in freemasonry. Even in a secularized form, isolated from Christian theology, the Golden Rule remains for many thinkers, even those outside Christianity, the expression of this natural law which offers an autonomous basis for moral exigencies and law, inscribed in the nature of man.

2. What is the origin of this doctrine?

The genesis of the Natural law = Golden Rule concept is to be found in several places:

1/ Judaism and Christianity converge at the time of Christ to proclaim that the Golden Rule on its own encompasses all Law (Matthew 7:12; Hillel in Shabbat 31a). But this of course refers to the Law of Moses and not natural law.

2/ As early as the first and second centuries AD, a frequent moral exhortation (or parainesis) appeared in Jewish or Judaeo-Christian writing, developing the reasoning behind this condensed formula: the key to understanding the commandments of the Decalogue is to be found in the Golden Rule:

“It happened that one came to Rabbi Akiba and said to him, 'Rabbi, teach me the whole Law all at once'. He answered, 'My son, Moses, our teacher, tarried on the mountain forty days and forty nights before he learned it, and you say, Teach me the all Law all at once! Nevertheless, my son, this is the fundamental principle of the Law: that which you hate respecting yourself, do not to your neighbour. If you desire that no one injure you in respect to what is yours, then do not injure him. If you desire that no one should carry off what is yours, then do not carry off what is your neighbour’s’” 18.

In the Doctrina Apostolorum, doubtless the version of the Duae Viae, also attested by the Didache, which appears to be closest to the Jewish source:

“I,2… Do not unto others as you would not have them do unto you.
I,3. Here is the interpretation of those words:
II,2. Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not bear false witness, etc. “19.

The same schema can be found in the Pseudo-Clementines (Recognitiones, Pseudo-Clementine)20 and in the Didascalia. Let us just recall the doctrine attested by the first two of those texts:

20 Texts probably from an Ebionite source from the late second or third centuries, showing profound Judaeo-Christian characteristics. The origin of this foundational work can be located between 222 and 325, see Introduction au Roman pseudo-clémentin, in Écrits Apocryphes chrétiens, Paris, La Pléiade, 2005, p.1186-1189, and G.STRECKER, Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen, T.U., 70, Berlin, 1981.
The Recognitiones Clementi:

“For almost the whole rule of our actions is summed up in this, that what we are unwilling to suffer we should not do to others.
- For as you would not be killed, you must beware of killing another;
- and as you would not have your own marriage violated, you must not defile another’s bed;
- you would not be stolen from, neither must you steal;
- and every matter of men’s actions is comprehended within this rule.”

The Pseudo-Clementines Homilies:

“…and the rest in one word,—as the God-fearing Jews have heard, do you also hear, and be of one mind in many bodies; let each man be minded to do to his neighbour those good things he wishes for himself. And you may all find out what is good, by holding some such conversation as the following with yourselves:
- You would not like to be murdered; do not murder another man:
- you would not like your wife to be seduced by another; do not you commit adultery:
- you would not like any of your things to be stolen from you; steal nothing from another.
And so understanding by yourselves what is reasonable, and doing it, you will become dear to God, and will obtain healing.”

3/ In Alexandrian Judaism, in Philo for example, then in Judaism in the first and second centuries CE, there is a rethinking of the unwritten law practised by the Righteous before Mosaic Law (Abraham, Noah…)24. This is known not as natural law, but as unwritten law, prior to Mosaic law.

4/ The major text of the Epistle to the Romans was to mark a transition and from the second century was to cause the Church Fathers, as we shall see, to bring together Gentile law and the Golden Rule:

Romans 2:14: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another”.

5/ With Justin, and later Irenaeus, this idea of the Golden Rule appeared in a context that suggests Romans 2:14, but it was with Origen that the link between the two neo-testament

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21 Recognitiones Clementi, VIII,56, P.G.,I,1397.
23 PHILO of ALEXANDRIA, On Abraham , §275, Philo’s Works, vol.6, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1984, p.133-135: “This man did the divine law and the divine commands (Gen., 26, 5). He did them not taught by written words, but unwritten nature gave him the zeal (ou grammasin anadidachtheis, all’agrapho tè phasei spoudasas) to follow where wholesome and untainted impulse led him “.
24 The Apocalypse of Baruch, LVII, 1, Engl. transl. by R.H.Charles, Translation of early documents, ser.I,9, London, Macmillan, 1918, p.175: “After these, thou didst see bright waters. This is the fount of Abraham, also his generations and advent of his son, and of oh his son’s son, and of those like them. 2. Because at that time, the unwritten Law was named amongst them, and the works of the commandments were then fulfilled... Text written between 70 and 135 (Pierre BOGAERT, Paris, Cerf, Sources Chrétienes 144,1969,Introduction, p.270). In his Commentary (t.2, S.C.145, p.110), Pierre Bogaert quotes many rabbinic texts about this distinction between written and unwritten Law, and about the respect in which it was held by Abraham : Eccl., 44,20. See also STRACK- BILLERBECK, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, t.3. Die Briefe des Neuen Testament, München, Beck, 1926, p.88-91.
texts (Matthew 7:12 and Romans 2:14) is clearly and definitively established, as we saw above.

From that point on, all the Greek, Syriac and Latin Fathers accept and teach this doctrine of the Golden Rule as being the content of natural law, the two most important and influential of whom are Augustine in the West and John Chrysostom in the East. However, as this tradition became established, the fact would be overlooked that it went some way further back, to Origen. It became a common, shared belief.

3. What does the conception of the Golden Rule as “natural law” mean?

First of all, it is understood as a law inscribed by God in the heart of man, according to a metaphorical expression, borrowed from a law inscribed by God on the tablet on Mount Sinai. The precept “Do not unto others as you would not have them do unto you” is now taken as a commandment on the same level as those of the Decalogue, which it recapitulates.

But the Fathers were not fooled by this representation: Origen himself demystifies the metaphorical representation:

“Now with respect to the words, ‘on their hearts’, it is not to be thought that the law is said to be written on the bodily organ which is named the heart. For how could the flesh bring forth so much understanding of wisdom or contain such a great reservoir of memory? Rather one should realize that the soul’s rational power is normally called the heart.”25

Their commentary also shows how this “naturalness” means that man may, by himself, recognize what is good or evil based on what horrifies or pleases him when it is done to him. The commentary of the Decalogue through the Golden Rule follows this line: the Golden Rule provides the key to understanding the prohibitions of the Decalogue. It is not an additional precept, but it does permit man on his own to understand what is good or evil by transferring to others what seems to him unjust or painful when he suffers it himself.

Finally, much later and only at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the term “natural law” was coined, the reason being that it is also attested by pagan authors, outside the Christian faith, as would be shown first by La Mothe le Vayer in France in 1642 in La Vertu des Payens, then by Benjamin Camfield in England, in 1671, in The Comprehensive Rule of Righteousness and Pufendorf in Germany, in 1672, in De Iure naturae et Gentium.

But today this law is recognized as natural for much more fundamental reasons:
- the recognition of the other is rooted in the animal nature of man, as is demonstrated today by primatologists investigating the empathic behaviour of certain higher animals, such as the anthropoid apes;

25 ORIGEN, Lectures on Romans, 2,9,2, ibid., p.132.
- the recognition of the other as the other, the capacity to “put oneself in other people’s shoes” \(^{26}\) is the basis of social life and language, because human nature is fundamentally interpersonal and relational.

Finally, one may wonder if the Golden Rule is not, anthropologically, a more fundamental and structuring rule than the prohibition on incest.

\(^{26}\) “To deal with others, as if we had exchanged Persons, and Circumstances with them, and they were in ours (George Borraston); “If I do but change the Scales, and put him in my place and my Self in his” (John Goodman); “Let the Tables be turned” (John Goodman)
The religion of Islam arose in Arabia during the 6th and 7th centuries CE. At this time among the pre-Islamic Pagan Arabs, hospitality and generosity were celebrated virtues, though the Golden Rule was not. Like many other tribal peoples, the pre-Islamic Arabs regarded the survival of the tribe, not the individual, as most essential and to be insured by the ancient rite of blood vengeance. In such a context, the law of the land was not the Golden Rule, but *lex talionis*, payback:

We forgave the sons of Hind

and said: “The folk are brothers.

“Perhaps the days will restore
the tribe as they were.”

But when the evil was plain and clear,
stripped bare to see,
And nothing remained but enmity,
then we paid back as they paid!
We strode like the stalking lion,
the furious lion,
With a devastating, crunching,
crushing blow,
And a thrust, gashing, spewing
like the mouth of a very full wineskin!
A little restraint when quick action is called for,
tells of servitude.
And in evil is salvation
when goodness can not save you.²

As suggested by this ode by Shahl ibn Shaybān al-Zimmānī (late 5th c. CE), revenge might protect the clan, but it could also ignite a prolonged vendetta and intra-tribal warfare between clans, thus destabilizing life and society. As a result, pre-Islamic Arab society became known as the al-Jāhilīyah, the “Age of Impetuosity,” as the Arab ideals of wisdom and restraint fell victim to quick tempers and rash actions.

The Golden Rule and the Qur’ān

However, in the seventh century, the prophet Muḥammad (c. 570-632) brought a different message and world view with the Qur’ān. As Muhammad declared in Mecca, God, not the tribe, ruled supreme over humanity, which was to submit to the Lord’s will and law. From this point on, the individual believer in community with other Muslims took precedent over the tribe and its obligations. Lex talionis was still permitted for redressing murder and physical injuries willfully inflicted upon a victim, but the Qur’ān forbade vendetta, and urged more peaceful forms of settlement, including material compensation and outright forgiveness (Q. 2:178; 4:92).

Forgiveness is a key theme in the Qur’ān, which repeatedly draws attention to God’s compassion and mercy for humanity. Every human being has a covenant with God to believe in Him and to do what is right, and God has sent prophets and scripture to guide humanity to correct belief and proper behavior. Therefore, the Qur’ān urges people to be mindful of the fact that while they are free to believe and do as they like, the standards of judgment belong to God:

Oh, you who believe, be mindful of God. Let each person consider what they have set aside for tomorrow. Be mindful of God, for He knows what you do. The residents of Hell and those of Heaven are not equal, for the residents of Paradise will be the winners! (59:18-19)

2 Abū Tammām, *Sharh Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*. A.A. Amīn and A. Hārūn, eds. (Cairo: Māṭbaʿāh Lajnah lil-Taʿlīf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1951), 1:32-38, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

As a result, the Qur’ān underscores individual moral responsibility in its many depictions of the Judgment Day when each person will be called to account for the good and bad deeds that s/he did:⁵

On that Day, people will come forward separately to be shown their deeds, and, so, whoever did an atom's weight of good will see it, and he who did an atom’s weight of evil will see it (99:6-7)

Each person, then, must submit (islām) to God and His will and strive to cultivate righteousness for success in this world and the next:

…Righteousness is from believing in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scriptures and the prophets, and from giving, out of love for Him, to one’s relatives, orphans, the wretched, travelers, and beggars, and [righteousness is] from freeing slaves, undertaking prayers, giving alms, fulfilling covenants that were pledged, and from patience in adversity… (2:177)

As noted in this verse, a righteous life is based on correct belief and right actions. Repeatedly the Qur’ān calls to “those who believe and do good works,” and a major theme of the Qu’rān is the need to work for social justice. Frequently, the Qur’ān exhorts Muslims to aid the oppressed:⁶

Those who spend their wealth in the way of God are like a grain that germinates into seven spikes, each with a hundred grains. Indeed, God will increase in

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abundance whomsoever He will, and God is bounteous, all-knowing. Those who spend their wealth in the way of God, and do not follow up their giving with reproach or insult, they will have their reward from their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve… [Spend] on the poor who are beleaguered in the way of God, unable to move about the land [to earn a living], though the ignorant thinks them rich because [of their] restraint. You will recognize them by their mark: they do not beg from people demanding things. Whatever charity you give, God is aware of it. Those who spend of their wealth [on others] night and day, in secret and in public, they will have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve (2:261-62; 273-74)

Furthermore, people are to be kind to each other and to be fair in their social and commercial transactions. They are always to “give full measure,” for to do otherwise is unjust.⁷

Accursed be those who give short measure, those who, when they receive their share among people, they take their full share. Yet when they measure or weigh the shares of others, they give less. Do they not imagine that they will be resurrected on an awesome day, a day when people will stand before the Lord of the Worlds? (83:1-6)

According to some Muslim authorities, this revelation came after Muhammad had immigrated with other persecuted Muslims to Medina in 622; there he found merchants who were not giving fair measure.\(^8\) The philosopher-commentator Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) noted that the issue of weights and measures was a fundamental function of any society, as the Qur’ān makes clear:

\[
\text{[God] raised the sky and set the balance that no one could cheat the scales. So give full measure and do not give less on the scales! (55:7-9)}
\]

Indeed, We sent Our messengers with clear signs, and We sent down with them the book and the scale so that people may practice justice! (57:25)\(^9\)

\textbf{Hadīth of the Golden Rule}

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razi and several other Qur’ānic commentators have pointed out that Qur’ān 83:1-6 is an implicit statement of the Golden Rule, which is explicitly stated in the tradition:

\[\text{“Pay, Oh Children of Adam, as you would love to be paid, and be just as you would love to have justice!”}^{10}\]

Similar examples of the Golden Rule are found among the hadīth of the prophet Muhammad. The hadīth recount what Muḥammad is believed to have said and done, and

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traditionally Muslims regard the ḥadīth as second only to the Qurʾān as a guide to correct belief and action. One ḥadīth of the Golden Rule is most often quoted in the major ḥadīth collections of sound traditions and, subsequently, in other Muslim religious literature. There Muḥammad said:

“None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself!”

Two of the most important collectors of ḥadīth, Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 875), cite this ḥadīth in their chapters on īmān, that is on “faith” or “belief.” This relates directly to Qurʾān 49:14:

The Bedouin say: “We believe.” Say [to them, Muḥammad]: “You do not believe. Rather say: ‘We submit,’ for belief has yet to enter your hearts. Then if you obey God and His messenger, He will not withhold from you any [reward] for your actions. Indeed, God is forgiving, merciful!”

According to Muslim tradition, some Bedouin professed Islam in order to have an alliance with Muḥammad during a time of draught so as to receive charity. The Qurʾān, then, distinguishes between a muslim, “one who submits” and professes to be a believer,

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and a *mu‘min*, “one who believes” in God and His revelations deep within his/her heart. This verse implies that there are levels of faith ranging from nominally holding a religion to being held intensely by it.

In this context, the great 15th century Muslim hadith scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Ṣaqālīnī (d. 1449) asserted that when Muḥammad said, “None of you believes,” he did not mean that one who fails to live the Golden Rule is an infidel but, rather, that one’s faith is not complete “until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” On the other hand, Ibn Ḥajar added, to claim that one who practiced the Golden Rule but not the Five Pillars of Islam, had perfect faith, was absurd. Clearly, for Ibn Ḥajar and other Muslim scholars, the Golden Rule was an ethical principle sanctioned by God, but enmeshed in a larger system of correct beliefs and actions.

Ibn Ḥajar also cited an example of the negative Golden Rule, that “one loath for one’s brother what one loathes for oneself of evil,” as well as several variations in the transmission of Muhammad’s positive Golden Rule:

“No worshipper (*‘abd*) believes until he loves for his brother and neighbor what he loves for himself!”

“No worshipper believes until he loves for his Muslim brother what he loves for himself self of good things!”

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15 See Michael Cook, *Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong In Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 3-12, and 585-96.
16 Ibid.
For Ibn Ḥajar, this last version clarified that Muslims were intended by the word “brother” as those to be loved as oneself. Perhaps, Ibn Ḥajar took comfort in this reading since he lived in Egypt during a time when more conservative Muslim scholars, like him, felt challenged by Crusaders, Mongols, Turks, and their infidel ways. However, the most common ḥadīth of the Golden Rule does not contain the adjective “Muslim,” and Ibn Ḥajar’s commentary on this ḥadīth generally treats the Golden Rule as a moral principle to desire sincerely for others the same exact material and spiritual good that one desires for oneself, and to act humbly. Indeed, humility is the key to the Golden Rule, and Ibn Ḥajar cites in support of this position the scholar and judge al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 1149), and Abū al-Zīnād ibn Sarrāj who stated:

The literal meaning of this ḥadīth is the pursuit of equal rights, and its realization necessitates giving preference (to others). Everyone loves to be preferred over others. So, if one can love for his brother as for himself, then he is among the virtuous.

Ibn Ḥajar then concludes his discussion of the ḥadīth of the Golden Rule by drawing out its ethical implications and the moral conduct required to put the Golden Rule into practice:

The upshot of this position is to incite one to humility, so that one does not want to be preferred over others, for it requires equality as supported by His, most high, saying [28:83]: {As to the next abode, We will give that to those who do not

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desire to be exalted in the world, nor are they corrupt}. One can not attain that except by eliminating (from oneself) envy, malice, resentment, and deceit, for all of those are base qualities.19

The Golden Rule in Muslim Tradition

Interpreted in this light, Muḥammad’s statement of the Golden Rule is a call to self-examination and religious transformation aimed not at reciprocity so much as humility by acknowledging the humanity of other human beings. Not surprisingly, this interpretation is found in the writings of Muslim mystics who stress the power of selfless love to bring the devotee closer to God.20 One of the most extensive discussions of the Golden Rule in Islamic mysticism appears in the Qur’ānic commentary by the celebrated 11th century Sufi scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1037) during his discussion of Qur’ān 83:1-6:

{Those who give short measure} are those who cheat when measuring or weighing. What is meant by that are those who do business with people, such that when they take for themselves, they take a full share, but when they wait on their customers, they short change them. This is seen clearly in weights and measures, and applies to finding fault, in making judgments, payments, and restitution. For if one does not want for his Muslim brother what he wants for himself, he is not

19 Ibid.
As for the righteous, whenever they regard Muslims, they regard everyone to be treated the same. Truth is honorable! This is their position regarding friendship and social relations.

As for him who sees faults in people, but does not see the fault in himself, then he is among {those who give short measure}. Just as it has been said:

You see the mote in my eye,
but not the log in your own!

So one who demands his right, but does not demand for others what he demands for himself, he is among {those who give short measure.}.

The chivalrous man (fat'an) is he who demands the rights for others, but does not demand from anyone a right for himself.22

In his commentary on {those who give short measure}, al-Qushayrī extends the Qur’ān’s critique of unfair business transactions to other human interactions, including the criticism of others. Similar to Ibn Ḥajar, al-Qushayrī appears to call for the Golden Rule to be applied between Muslims; nothing is said about Muslim interactions with non-Muslims. This is not to deny non-Muslims their humanity, but to acknowledge the Qur’ān’s recognition of religious diversity as found in a number of passages that state

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21 A later Sufi, the famous Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), put it this way (Masnavī, Bk 6, v. 1569):

That which you don't find agreeable for yourself, O Shaykh of Religion
How can you find it agreeable for your brother, O trustworthy one?

My thanks to Dr. Frank Lewis, University of Chicago, for this reference and translation.

that various monotheistic religious communities have their own particular scripture and law to follow:

For each of you, We have made a law and a course of action. Had God wished, He would have made you one religious community, but He tests you by what He has given you. So vie with one another in doing good deeds! (5:48)

Moreover, the Qur’an warns Muslims against being overly friendly with Christians, Jews, or others who may wish them harm (e.g., 2:120, 5:51, 5:82). In such cases, the Golden Rule would not be recommended, as other commands of God would take precedence (e.g., 9:29).

Al-Qushayrī then highlights the basic reciprocal nature of the Golden Rule by comparing the righteous with the unrighteous Muslim. The righteous Muslim strives to treat all Muslims as his equal, while the unrighteous Muslim wants only his due; he sees other people’s shortcomings while being heedless of his own. Finally, al-Qushayrī adds a third type of person, the fatan or “chivalrous man.” Within Islamic mysticism such an individual has conquered his selfishness and concupiscence (nafs) and so is regarded as a true hero. Discussing such spiritual chivalry known as al-futuwwah, al-Qushayrī wrote elsewhere:

“The companions of the cave (Qur’ān 18:13) are called [chivalrous men] because they believed in their Lord without any intermediary.” It is said, “The chivalrous man is he who smashes idols, for God Most High says, ‘We heard a youth [fatan]

denounce the idols. He is called Abraham’ (21:60), and ‘He smashed the idols to pieces’ (21:58). The idol of every man is his own self \(nafs\). So one who opposes his passions is truly chivalrous.”

For such a hero, the ultimate goal of the Golden Rule is altruism and the elimination of selfish desires by putting the needs of others before one’s own:

[The Sufi] Ma’rūf al-Karkhī [d. 815], may God have mercy upon him, said: “One who claims to be chivalrous must have three qualities: fidelity without fear, generosity without thought of praise, the ability to give without being asked.”

Chivalry is when one does not hold himself or his actions in high regard, nor expects a return for his effort.

Another noted Sufi and theologian Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) mentions the Golden Rule in an epistle directed at those who desire to live a pious life:

…[M]ake your relations with God the Exalted such that were a servant of yours to behave thus with you, you would be content with him and not be weary of liking him, nor get angry. Whatever would dissatisfy you for yourself on the part of this hypothetical servant of yours, should dissatisfy you also for God the Exalted, and He is actually your Lord!… [W]henever you interact with people, deal with them

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as you would wish yourself to be dealt with by them, for a worshipper’s faith is incomplete until he wants for other people what he wants for himself. 28

Similar to al-Qushayrī, al-Ghazālī paraphrases the ḥadīth of the Golden Rule as he clearly states that our interactions with others should mirror our relationship with God. Just as a slave owner would wish his servants to be honest and obedient, so, too, should we be unselfish and obedient toward God, our true Lord. 29 Perhaps building on al-Ghazālī’s brief remarks, the great 13th century Sufi theologian, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) referred to the Golden Rule in his own epistle to those who wish to follow the Sufi path:

Among the things you must posses is [the grace of] avoiding those who are opposed [to your way of life], and people who are not of you sort, without, however, entertaining any thought of wronging them such as may occur to you, but with the intention of choosing the friendship and company of the True One rather than theirs. Also in your relations with animals let there be tenderness and compassion for them, for they are creatures whom the True One has put under constraint for your service. So do not load them more than they can bear, nor ride them carelessly or with abandon. Similarly with regard to slaves who are under your hand, [remember that] they are your brethren, whose forelocks [God] has given you to possess that He may see how you conduct yourself with them. You

27 Ibid., 17.
29 See Wattles, Golden Rule, 33-35, and the very similar argument put forward by Socrates in the Phaedo.
are His slave—glory be to Him—and you would not like Him to conduct Himself in an evil manner with you. Treat them exactly as He [has treated you], and you will be rewarded for that on a Day when you stand in need of it. If you have a family, treat them with kindness, for all [of us] are children, including yourself. All the commandments are summed up in this, that whatever you would like the True One to do to you, that do to His creatures, step by step.\textsuperscript{30}

From this passage, Ibn al-\textsuperscript{c}Arab\textsuperscript{i} appears to justify the Golden Rule based on God’s acts of mercy toward His creation.\textsuperscript{31} The Golden Rule, then, becomes a general principle of compassion that also relates to human interactions with animals. Since God created the world and made humanity vice-regent over the animals, human beings should care for them with kindness. So, too, a parent is to be kind to his children, while slaves should be treated respectfully for they are humans, like their masters, and all humans are, in fact, God’s servants. What is also noteworthy about this passage by Ibn al-\textsuperscript{c}Arab\textsuperscript{i}, as well as earlier statements by al-Qushayr\textsuperscript{i}, al-Ghaz\textsuperscript{a}l\textsuperscript{i}, and Ibn \Haj\textsuperscript{a}r is that the Golden Rule does not nullify all difference in a universal equality so much as it operates among groups of similar members. That is to say, within Classical Islam, and I suspect in nearly all pre-modern religious and philosophical traditions, there are basic social, legal, theological, even ontological, distinctions and hierarchies that constrain the Golden Rule; these include God-humanity; Muslim-non-Muslim; free person-slave; ruler-subject; adult-child, and man-woman. The Qur’\textsuperscript{a}n’s statements on male-female relations are

\textsuperscript{30} Ibn al-\textsuperscript{c}Arab\textsuperscript{i}, \textit{Kunhi mā lā budhu lil-murīd}, tr. Arthur Jeffery in his \textit{Reader on Islam} (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962), 647.

\textsuperscript{31} Cf., the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE Jewish Ben Sira text and \textit{The Letter of Aristeas} mentioned in Wattles, \textit{Golden Rule}, 44-46.
instructive here. The Qur’an declares unequivocally that male and female believers are equal in the eyes of God (33:35):

Indeed, men who have submitted and women who have submitted, believing men and believing women, pious men and pious women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, modest men and modest women, men who give alms and women who give alms, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their private parts and remember God often, God will forgive them and give them a great reward!

Nevertheless, men are still ranked “a degree” above women (2:228) in terms of social relations, particularly within the family which the husband is expected to support financially (e.g., 4:34).\(^{32}\) The issue then is not so much treating everyone the same, but rather treating each person appropriately, as noted by the Chinese philosopher Confucius:\(^{33}\)

What you would require of your son, use in serving your father;…what you would require of your subordinate, use in serving your prince…what you would require of your younger brother, use in serving your elder brother;… what you would require of your friend, first apply in your treatment of him.

Only in the last category of “friend,” do we find a notion of equals, and this holds true for Islam as well, particularly in its philosophical tradition. Owing much to Plato

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and Aristotle, the Persian philosopher and ethicist Aḥmad Miskawayh (d. 963) noted that love is the key to being fair and just.\textsuperscript{34} Yet, social relations must be carefully observed and taken into account:

[O]ne should know the ranks of the various kinds of love, and what each person deserves to get from the other so that he will not offer to a foreign chief the honor due to a father, nor to a sovereign that due to a friend, nor to kinsmen that due to a child, nor to a father that due to a mother. For every one of these and their like is entitled to a kind of honor and a right of repayment which are not appropriate to any other. If one does not discriminate among these obligations, confusion and corruption will affect them and reproaches will take place, but if he discharges to every one his due and share of love, service, and good counsel, he will be acting justly and his love and the justice manifest in it will obligate his friends and associates to love him in return. The same should be followed in one’s fellowship with one’s friends, comrades, and companions; he should observe their rights and render to each one of them what is due to him.\textsuperscript{35}

Miskawayh also stressed that love and its relationships must be based on a mutual respect and for seeking the good, and not for purposes of personal profit or

\textsuperscript{33} Quoted by Wattles, \textit{Golden Rule}, 18.
\textsuperscript{35} Aḥmad Miskawayh, \textit{The Refinement of Character (Tadhīḥ al-Akhlāq)}, tr. by Constantine K. Zurayk, (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1968), 135.
aggrandizement. Such adulterated or counterfeit love will quickly degenerate along with the relationship leading to hypocrisy, discord, and hate. 36

Reproach and rebuke may enter even into the love that exists between the chief and the subject, or the rich man and the poor, because of the divergences of the causes, and because each of them expects from the other a reward which he does not get. Their mutual intentions become spoiled, they find each other slow [to give], and they blame each other. This condition ceases when the two parties observe justice, and when each of them is satisfied to get from the other only as much as he has a right to and each of them accepts to treat the other with the justice which lies between them. Slaves, in particular, are not satisfied unless their masters give them more than what they deserve, while the masters find them too slow in the performance of their duties and in [showing] solicitude and goodwill, all of which leads to reproach and bad conscience. 37 This is the reproachful love of which [one] can hardly ever be free unless one follows the stipulation of justice, and seeks the mean in what he deems to be his right and is satisfied with it. But this is difficult.

On the other hand, the mutual love of virtuous people is not motivated by any external pleasure or any benefit, but is due to their essential similarity, namely in aiming at what is good and seeking virtue. Thus, when one of them loves another because of his similarity, no difference or dispute takes place between them. They exchange advice and agree to be just and equal in their desire of the good. This equal rendering of advice and desire of the good is what

36 Ibid., 130-34.
unifies their multiplicity. This is why a friend is defined as another person who is yourself, but is other than your person, and this is why he is so rarely found. The friendship of the young, the common people, and those who are not wise is unreliable because such people love and befriend for the sake of pleasure and benefit. They do not know the good in reality and their motives are not sound.

For Miskawayh, then, true friendship as embodied in the Golden Rule is very rare indeed. Nevertheless, if only as an ideal, the Golden Rule may usefully serve as a basis for a social contract to promote civic virtue and good government:

For a man loves his friend and wishes for him what he wishes for himself; and no confidence, or cooperation, or mutual help can take place except among those who love one another. Thus, if people cooperate and are bound by love, they will attain all the desirable things and will not fail to secure the objects of their search, even though these objects may be hard and difficult. They will then bring forth sound opinions, their minds will collaborate in deducing any right measures which may be obscure, and they will strengthen themselves in order to gain all the goods by cooperation. Aristotle was one of those who supported and confirmed this opinion… Indeed this is the noblest end for the people of a city. For if the citizens love one another, they will be in close relation, and each man will wish for his companion what he wishes for himself. Their numerous capacities will become one, and none of them will fail to arrive at a sound opinion or right

action. In all that they attempt to do, they will be like a person who wants to
move a heavy weight by himself and is not able to do so, but if he is assisted by
others he can then set it in motion. Indeed, the manager of the city aims, in all his
measures at binding his people by ties of affection. If he succeeds in attaining this
aim in particular, he will achieve all the goods which will be difficult for him, or
for the citizens, to achieve individually. He will then overcome his rivals, build
up his country, and live happily with his subjects.39

Miskawayh’s linking of the Golden Rule to the idea of a just ruler has earlier
precedents in Muslim literature, including the “mirrors for princes.” This genre gave
advice to caliphs, viziers, amirs, and their sons regarding political and ethical norms,
statecraft, and justice, whether as Realpolitik or righteous ideals.40 Among the earliest
and influential “mirrors” were several works by ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Muqaffāʾ (d. c. 756) a
Persian secretary to the caliph’s court in Baghdad. Ibn al-Muqaffāʾ’s most popular work,
Kalīlah wa-Dimnah, is his translation into Arabic of ancient Indian animal fables, which
offer advice and political wisdom regarding human relations and governance. The tales
are told by a philosopher in response to questions from an Indian king. The story of “The
Lioness, the Archer and the Jackal” may ultimately derive from the twelfth book of the
Indian epic, the Mahābhārata.41

38 Miskawayh would probably agree with those thinkers who believe that “the Golden Rule can be accepted
unambiguously but applied only after considerable reflection and qualification.” See Green, “Parsing
Reciprocity,” 3.
39 Miskawayh, Refinement of Character, 118.
40 On this genre see C.E. Bosworth, “Mirrors for Princes,” in Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, ed. Julie
41 ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Muqaffāʾ, Kalīlah wa-Dimnah (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1987), 306-10. Also see F.
The King said to Bidpai, the philosopher: “Strike me a parable about someone who avoids harming others after he had experienced his own tragedy, which served as a warning and a restraint to him regarding perpetuating oppression and aggression toward others.”

The philosopher replied: “No one seeks to harm people or act meanly toward them save the ignorant low-lifers and those who are short-sighted regarding the consequences of affairs in this world and the next, and who are dim-witted regarding the resulting punishment and unimaginable effects that will befall them in turn. A few give up harming others after misfortune befalls them, and so they become mindful of what they do. But one who never thinks about the consequences is never safe from misfortunes and, truly, he does not escape from ruin. On occasion, however, an ignorant person is warned and taught a lesson… Then as a result, he profits and abstains from hurting others, as was the case in the story of the lioness, the archer, and the jackal.”

The King said: “How does that go?”

The philosopher said: “There once was a lioness in the jungle who had two cubs. It happened that she went out to hunt, and she left the two behind in their cave. An archer passed by and came upon the two cubs. He shot and killed them both. Then he skinned off their hides, put the hides in his bag, and left for home. When the lioness returned, she saw the shocking fate that had occurred to her cubs. She doubled over in grief, screeching and moaning. A jackal was nearby, and when he heard her screeching he said to her:

‘What are you doing? What has befallen you? Tell me about it.’”
The Lioness said: ‘My two cubs! An archer passed by and killed them both! He stripped their hides, bagged them, and left my two skinned cubs!’

The jackal said to her: ‘Don’t cry; pull yourself together! Know that the archer did to you only what you have done to others. For you did similar things to those who found their friends and dear ones, as you have found your cubs. So you must endure the actions of others, as others have endured you actions. As it has been said: “As you pay, so you will be repaid.” Every deed, whether great or small, bears the fruit of a like reward or punishment. Like sowing, the reaper harvests as he has sown.’

The lioness replied: ‘Explain to me what you have said. Speak plainly its implications’

The jackal said: ‘How old are you?’

The lioness replied: ‘One hundred.’

The jackal said: ‘What do you eat?’

The lioness replied: ‘The meat of wild animals.’

The jackal said: ‘Who feeds it to you?’

The lioness replied: ‘I hunt wild animals, and I eat them.’

The jackal said: ‘Haven’t you thought about the wild animals that you have eaten, that they had fathers and mothers?’

The lioness replied: ‘Yes.’

The jackal said: ‘And me, I have seen and heard those fathers and mothers grieve and mourn just as I saw and heard you. Isn’t what has befallen you
due to your short-sightedness regarding consequences and your thinking
so little about the harm they would return to you?’

“When the lioness heard these words from the jackal, she realized that she had
sinned against herself, that her actions were unjust and oppressive. So she gave
up hunting and instead of eating meat, she lived on fruit, ascetic practices, and
worship. But when the wild dove, who resided in this jungle and lived on fruit,
saw this he said to her:

‘I have long thought that this tree we have in common would cease
bearing fruit because of scarce water. Then I saw you eating the fruit,
though you are a carnivore. But you gave up your sustenance, food, and
what God decreed for you, and adapted to the sustenance of others, with
whom you now compete and overpower in your consumption. I know that
the common tree bore fruit, just as it bore fruit before today. But it gave
little fruit relative to your large appetite. So woe to the tree, woe to its
fruit, and woe to those who live on it! How quick will be their destruction
when one who is not supposed to be a vegetarian competes and
overpowers them in eating fruit!’

“When the lioness heard the words of the wild dove, she gave up eating fruit and
turned to living off grass and worship.”

“So I have struck this parable for you to show that the ignorant may turn
away from harming people after suffering harm themselves, just as the lioness,
after what happened to her cubs, gave up eating meat, then fruit after listening to
the wild dove, and she turned to ascetic devotions and worship. For it has been
said: ‘That which you do not want for yourself, do not do to someone else.’ In that is justice, and God wishes for justice, and people wish for justice too.”

“The Lioness, the Archer, and the Jackal” is ostensibly a tale about actions and their consequences. The Indian law of karma is suggested by the jackal’s early remark: “‘Every deed, whether great or small, bears the fruit of a like reward or punishment.’” The story may also be read as an argument for non-violence and, certainly, as a parable of the Golden Rule, the negative version of which ends the story: “‘That which you do not want for yourself, do not do to someone else.’” Further, the tale has political implications, since in *Kalīlah wa-Dīmnah*, the lion is the king of beasts and so represents a human ruler. On the one hand the message is clear that a ruler should not ignore his subjects and thereby oppress them. However, when the lioness changes her ways, her vegetarianism has the unexpected consequence of depriving others of their vital food source. Ultimately, the lioness gives up fruit to live on grass and acts of worship, and while this rather odd image of a grazing lion might portray an Indian and/or Muslim ascetic ideal, it does go against the animal’s God-given nature as the dove points out: “‘But you gave up your sustenance, food, and what God decreed for you, and adapted to the sustenance of others, with whom you now compete and overpower in your consumption.’” Once again, the Golden Rule may have been evoked not to counsel equality, but action appropriate to one’s station in life.

Reciprocity: Retaliation or Reconciliation?
Treating people equitably in commercial transactions is a Qur’ānic command for social justice, and the hadīth of the Golden Rule in its most popular and general form “None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself!” may be understood to apply to all humanity, not only a select group. This appears to be the gist of another saying ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad. One day a certain Muslim man commanded his servant to slaughter a sheep and distribute it to others beginning with his Jewish neighbors. The servant, perplexed that he should give a portion to a Jewish family, let alone the first portion, hesitated until his master told him that he had heard the Prophet say: “One should look after one’s neighbors to the extent that one considers them his legal heirs.”

As with many examples of the Golden Rule found in Muslim sources, this hadīth, too, proscribes for the actor that he treat others with kindness, dignity, and respect by placing their needs before his own. For many Muslim scholars, and especially the mystics, the Golden Rule was not primarily a call for reciprocity or retaliation, but a means to cultivate humility, selflessness, and altruistic behavior. By contrast for the Muslim ethicist Miskawayh, the Golden Rule represented a rare, ideal friendship between equals as well as the basis for a social contract leading to the greater good of all. In Ibn al-Muqaffāʾ’s advice to rulers, the Golden Rule warned them to treat their subjects with justice or face the consequences, whether in this world or the next.

We see, then, that Muslims have interpreted and applied the Golden Rule in several contrasting ways, and two recent examples underscore dramatically different understandings of reciprocity. On the negative side is retaliation as pay-back, the lex talionis of old, now championed in the name of Islam by Osama Bin Laden:

There is a lesson in what is happening in occupied Palestine, and what happened on September 11, [2001] and [in Spain] on March 11, [2004] are your goods returned to you… In what creed are your dead considered innocent but ours worthless? By what logic does your blood count as real and ours no more than water. Reciprocal treatment is part of justice, and he who commences hostilities is the unjust one… Therefore stop spilling our blood to save your own… For we only killed Russians after they invaded Afghanistan and Chechnya, we only killed Europeans after they invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, and we only killed Americans in New York after they supported the Jews in Palestine and invaded the Arabian peninsula, and we only killed them in Somalia after they invaded it in Operation Rescue Hope. We restored them to hopelessness, thank God.⁴³

As we all know too well, Bin Laden’s calls for reciprocal violence have been answered by the United States and some of its allies with more violence, as the crisis in the Middle East has escalated and precipitated a civil war in Iraq. Daily, clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims result in blood shed and death, often of children and other innocent civilians. In such a situation, invocations of a “war on terror” or “jihād” do not bring justice; they are cynical justifications for crimes against humanity and a new Jāhilīyah, a new “Age of Impetuosity.”

Yet in contrast to Bin Laden, there is another Muslim call for reciprocity, a positive one of reconciliation. In an attempt to seek world peace and international justice, over one hundred and twenty-five Muslim clerics and scholars from around the world

sent an open letter to Pope Benedict XVI and other world leaders of Christianity on October 13, 2007. Entitled “A Common Word Between Us” the letter affirms that the common beliefs held by Jews, Christians, and Muslims in “the love of one God, and love of the neighbor” should serve as “a basis for peace and understanding.”

Central to their message is the Golden Rule in various forms including Leviticus 19:17-18, Matthew 22:38-40, Mark 12:31, and the hadith: “None of you believes until you love for your brother what you love for yourself!” The letter interprets the Golden Rule as referring to a common human kinship and to compassion for one’s fellow human beings.

Moreover, the letter accepts religious pluralism and states emphatically “that Muslims, Christians, and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them…for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur’ān: Let there be no compulsion in religion [2:256]. The letter ends with a call for building a world of peace and harmony on this common ground. Invoking the Golden Rule, these Muslim seek to end the violence in order to promote justice and mutual goodwill, so that, together, we may “vie one with another in good works.” (5:48)

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44 http://www.acommonword.com/, 3.
45 Ibid., 11-12.
46 Similarly, see Wattles, Golden Rule, 183-84.
48 Ibid., 16.
INTRODUCTION

In our attempt to study the form and significance of the Golden Rule in its myriad manifestations through various religions, one challenge we face concerns the selection of a recognizable textual formula. In the vast corpus of Buddhist texts, where is there a verse that corresponds to the well-known “in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you” (Matt 7:12)? Once we have chosen a core moral maxim that approximates the Christian biblical exhortation, another challenge presents itself. In what interpretive community might such a verse have come into being, and what have the intervening layers of interpretive communities – including our own layer of modern scholarship – done to determine the focus, centrality, and meaning of said verse? This is an especially challenging project when we consider Theravāda Buddhism, a form of Buddhism practiced throughout Southeast Asia and elsewhere in many different schools and veins of thought. While the tradition maintains a historical narrative that posits a direct, unbroken link with the teachings of the Buddha himself, the vicissitudes of history challenge the idea of a singular, monolithic, unchanging entity such as the Theravāda. Even something as solid and authoritative as a major division of Buddhist thought and practice has experienced periodic assessments of their own doctrines and practices,
changes that are reflected and argued in commentaries and other genres of texts that give us a window into the most salient concerns of communities of practitioners of the past.¹

Surveying 2500 years’ worth of material is a daunting task, and yet there appears to be an enduring thread through the most influential treatises within the constellation of ideas and practices we call the Theravāda that can assure us the search is not folly. This thread is the inescapable emphasis on what is moral, both in intention and behavior. Where other religious traditions may pronounce one central, unifying concept such as a belief in God, Buddhism in its many forms maintains the development of the individual as a moral agent. It is nowhere more apparent than in culminating verse of the foundational Four Noble Truths, articulated in the Buddha’s first sermon upon reaching enlightenment: There is a path leading to the cessation of dis-ease (dukkha) that consists of eight right (good, perfect, sammā) behaviors involving oneself and others.²

A concern for morality is such a unifying thread, and is evident in the development of certain guidelines and goals like the articulation and growing importance of the cultivation of ten perfections as explicit outcomes that give name and form to the underlying yet nebulous sense of ethics. Reflecting his assessment of the centrality of morality to Buddhist practice, Damien Keown begins his book on Buddhist ethics thus:

¹ For example, what we think of as “Theravāda” may result from the agenda of a particular school of monks wrestling for the support of a king in the fourth through sixth centuries. See Jonathan S. Walters, “Mahāyāna, Theravāda and the Origins of the Mahāvihāra,” The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities (University of Peradeniya) 23, nos.1 and 2 (1997): 100-119. Likewise, the reforms of Parakramabahu – FIX cite.

² “Now this… is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.” (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya 56.11), Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A new translation of the Samyutta Nikāya (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1844.
Morality is woven into the fabric of Buddhist teachings and there is no major branch or school of Buddhism that fails to emphasize the importance of the moral life. The scriptures of Buddhism in every language speak eloquently of virtues such as non-violence and compassion, and the Buddhist version of the ‘Golden Rule’ counsels us not to do anything to others we would not like done to ourselves.\(^3\)

In Theravāda Buddhism, the universe depends on the actions of individuals within it. Moral action has an impact on the status of beings in samsāra, the “wandering on” cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. The goal, both proximate and eventual, of a Theravāda Buddhist is to cultivate oneself as a moral agent. The eventual goal to become an enlightened being who is no longer subject to requires the cultivation of ten perfections (pārami in Pāli, pāramitā in Sanskrit).\(^4\) The rounds of rebirth within samsāra occur because of karma, literally action, which is an assumed system that operates in the universe of human actions. Through the many rounds of rebirth an individual endures, the individual meets with multiple opportunities to cultivate merit through action. Moral actions are skilful, unskilful or neutral, and they accrue concomitant weight. Skilful moral actions earn merit, or puñña, while negative or unskilful actions result in demerit, pāpa. This is the way the world works – one’s actions have effects, and one has the ability to exert agency in determining the moral weight of one’s effects by intending to do good things. The canonical formulation attributed to the voice of the Buddha himself links moral actions with intention, “It is intention (cetanā), O monks, that I call Karma; having willed one acts through body, speech, or mind.”\(^5\)

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\(^4\) The ten perfections, as they appear in the Buddhavamsa and Jātaka Nidānakatha among other texts, are as follows: dāna (generosity); sila (morality); nekkhamma (renunciation); paññā (wisdom); viriya (effort); khanti (patience); sacca (honesty); aditthāna (determination); mettā (loving-kindness); upekkhā (equanimity).

\(^5\) Anguttara Nikāya.iii.415
In what follows, the focus will not be on the particular frameworks of thought that arise through and determine the course of the history of Theravādin practice, such as the development of the doctrine of ten perfections. Instead, the focus will be on the underlying sentiment running through Theravāda, namely that individuals are compelled to do good acts and cultivate their own self potential for enlightenment and the eventual snuffing out of samsāra that is nibbāna, that is of a moral nature, and that is articulated in text. Within the matrix of karmic relationships through time, individuals have repeated opportunities to be each other’s mothers or daughters, and so in Buddhist understanding the distinction between the self and an other is less concrete. Moral agents can be viewed as not necessarily inhabiting conflicting universes. In his chapter in this volume, William Scott Green asks:

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?⁶

In the Theravādin conception, the self and the other do not inhabit conflicting, but rather conflated moral universes. In other words, when each and every “other” might have been your mother in a past life or might be your mother in a future one, what you do in this life that you have now matters. Reflecting on the Golden Rule as it appears in one particular canonical text affords the opportunity to see another indication of the central importance of the moral life.

I. What does the Golden Rule say?

⁶ William Scott Green, this volume, pp.?
There is one canonical passage that is often chosen to represent the Buddhist take on the Golden Rule. In isolation from its context, the Golden Rule in Buddhism reads “one who loves himself should not harm another.” It is neither completely positive nor negative, but conditional and relative; moreover, it falls somewhere between a simple observation and a prescriptive command. If a person loves himself, he should not harm another because that would violate the integrity of an other’s self. This becomes clearer when more of the context for the verse is revealed:

\[
\text{On traversing all directions with the mind} \\
\text{One finds no one dearer than oneself.} \\
\text{Likewise everyone holds himself most dear,} \\
\text{Hence one who loves himself should not harm another.}^{8}
\]

The verse states that throughout the universe there are many individuals, and yet an individual has the most investment in oneself. Self-interest is simply a fact, and we can deduce that every other individual is similarly self-interested. It is on this basis that one should not harm another, because it would be a violation of an other’s self-interest.

To properly assess the gist of the rule, even more of the context should be considered. It is formulated in a narrative setting and the narrative is integral to the right comprehension of the Golden Rule as it is formulated. In fact, the Golden Rule comes in the form of an “inspired utterance” of the most legitimating voice, the Buddha himself. That utterance is contained within a frame narrative, and the frame reveals the catalyst for the proclamation as another story altogether. As we will see, the narrative is integral to the Golden Rule.\(^9\) “That the basic formulation of the Golden Rule so easily generates and

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\(^7\) John D. Ireland, 68.  
\(^8\) John D. Ireland, 68.  
\(^9\) The relationship between the “inspired utterance” and its narrative context is not always so obvious in the Udāna vāggas (sections). In the case of this first chapter of the Udāna’s Sonavāgga (Section on the layman Sona), the relationship is unusually clear.
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."\[^{10}\]

We will follow William Scott Green’s suggestion and pay particular attention to the narrative context in which we find Pāli Buddhism’s correlative Golden Rule.

It is no accident that such a universally salient teaching, for the Buddhist tradition, comes filtered through narrative. Narrative literature plays a formative part in the making of a Buddhist moral agent. Narratives are some of the first vehicles employed to teach profound truths, dhamma.\[^{11}\] And narratives are employed throughout all genres of Buddhist texts illustrate the profundity and applicability of dhamma.

II. What does the Golden Rule mean?

In the Khuddaka Nikāya ("Miscellaneous Collection"), a subsection of the suttas ("sermons") contained in the Pāli Buddhist Tipitaka ("canon"\[^{12}\]), is where we find the maxim that best approximates the Golden Rule as it is formulated in other traditions. The Khuddaka Nikāya exerts a powerful influence upon Buddhist thought and practice in spite of the misleading "minor" or "lesser" attribution of its title. Some of the best known Buddhist texts are among its collection. The Dhammapāda, perhaps one of the most translated and utilized texts from the Buddhist canon, precedes the Udāna in the

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\[^{10}\] William Scott Green, Keynote, this volume, page ###

\[^{11}\] Dhamma (Sanskrit, dharma) in the Buddhist context refers to the Buddha’s teachings. In the pan-Indic context it conveys a vast semantic field, meaning law, order, morality, righteousness, duty, responsibility, religion, etc.

\[^{12}\] Whether or not the Pāli Tipitaka may be rightly called a canon is a matter of debate. The Christian concept carries with it a sense of holy scripture and of dogma that are different than what we find in Buddhism. That said, it is a collection of authoritative texts, commended by regular Buddhist councils beginning shortly after the death of the Buddha, and the Tipitaka texts convey both prescriptions and norms. For more on the canonicity of the Pāli Tipitaka, see Steven Collins, “On the Very Idea of the Pāli Canon,” Journal of the Pāli Text Society 15 (1990): 89-126.
Khuddaka collection, and the collection also includes the Jātaka and Buddhavamsa. As an anthology, the Udāna collects together vital texts that guide the practitioner in his or her practice of cultivating the moral self, and several of these texts can be found in other places in the Pāli canon as well.

Our verse is contained within this Udāna, a collection of eighty suttas. In spite of its canonical pedigree, and its ubiquity on websites dedicated to the Golden Rule in the world’s religious traditions, the location of the formula is buried in the midst of a composite text from a bulky section of a bulkier canon. The sixth century monk Dhammapāla’s commentary on the Udāna, the Paramatthadipani, explains the semantic field of the term Udāna thus:

In what sense is the word udāna used? It is the expiration of an accumulated thrill-wave of strong emotion (piti). Just as oil and such-like material for measurement, when it cannot occupy the measure (māna) oozes out, and that is called ‘the overflow’; and as the water which a reservoir cannot hold runs out, and that is called ‘flood-water,’ even so that accumulated thrill-wave of strong emotion, of thought directed and diffused (vitakka-vipphāra), which the heart cannot contain, when it grows to excess cannot stay within, but bursts forth by way of the door of speech, regardless of who receives it – in fact an extraordinary expiration (udāhāra-vīseso) – that is called udāna.

The udāna, thus, is an outpouring of emotional expression, an eruption of sorts into the world of the text of a truth that cannot be easily contained.

Each sutta in the Udāna follows a formula: it begins by the stock phrase “Thus have I heard,” which signals its status as a full-fledged sutta text. It then orients the occasion for the text vis-à-vis the Buddha proper, telling within the narrative where the Buddha was staying at that time and how the tale that would follow came to his attention.

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13 *Evam me suttam*. The suttas were initially orally transmitted, and this particular phrase carries with it the connection to the Buddha’s legitimating authoritative teaching voice. The “I” in the formulation is none other than the Buddha’s right hand man Ananda, who reportedly repeated each and every sermon he heard from the Buddha’s own mouth to the first Buddhist council of 500 monks, convened in Rājagaha upon the Buddha’s final parinibbāna (passing away). See John Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1950), pp. 416-426.
and how it provided him the opportunity to “breathe forth” (udānesi) the “inspired utterance” (udānam). Once oriented, the text opens on a royal exchange between the Kosalan king Pasenadi and his main queen Mallika:

Thus have I heard: On a certain occasion the Exalted One was staying near Sāvatthi, at Jeta Grove in Anāthapindika’s Park.

Now on that occasion the rājah Pasenādi, the Kosalan, had gone with the Queen Mallikā to the upper storey of the palace. Then the rājah Pasenādi, the Kosalan, said this to Mallikā the queen: ‘Tell me, Mallikā, is there anyone dearer to you than the self?’

‘To me, Maharājāh, there is no other dearer to myself than the self. But to you, maharājāh, is there anyone dearer than the self?’

‘To me also, Mallikā, there is no other dearer than the self.’

Thereafter the rājah Pasenādi, the Kosalan, came down from the palace and went to see the Exalted One, and on coming to him saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated the rājah Pasenādi, the Kosalan, said this to the Exalted One: ‘Sir, I had gone with the queen Mallikā to the upper storey of the palace, and I said this to the queen Mallikā… (and he related the conversation).

Thereupon the Exalted One at that time, seeing the meaning of it, gave utterance to this verse of uplift:

_The whole wide world we traverse with our thought,_
_Finding to man nought dearer than the self._
_Since aye so dear the self to others is,_
_Let the self-lover harm no other man._

The translation of the udāna verse rendered by John D. Ireland is less stilted and dated:

_On traversing all directions with the mind_
_One finds no one dearer than oneself._
_Likewise everyone holds himself most dear,_
_Hence one who loves himself should not harm another._

The literary context to some degree constrains an interpretation of the Golden Rule’s meaning by embedding it in a particular narrative, namely an encounter with the

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14 Each narrative section that precedes the utterance of uplift concludes with the same stock phrase, the repetition of which signifies to the reader that he is about to receive the Udānam, or “verse of uplift”: “Then, on realizing its significance, the Lord uttered on that occasion this inspired utterance” (atha kho bhagavā etam attham viditvā tāyam velāyam imam udānam udānesi).” Quoted from John D. Ireland, p.1.
15 “atthi nu kho te Mallike koc’ añño attanā piyataro?” PTS, p.47. “Attana” means “yourself.”
18 John D. Ireland, 68.
Buddha himself. But as we see from the commentarial explanation of the term udāna, something so profound and emotionally rich is hardly able to be constrained, even by the arbiter of equanimity, the Buddha himself.

The underlying sentiment of reciprocity and respect in the Udāna formulation of the Golden Rule fuels the Theravādin interpretive tradition. To get a sense of its impact, we can look at other texts such as the Dhammapada that operate in the same constellation of meaning and are collected in the same canonical grouping as the Udāna, to see how the ideas take alternate but resonant forms. We can look at the commentarial tradition, the evidence of a very active interpretive community, that seeks to explain and interpret the verse. And we might also profitably turn to a text of another genre entirely, the Pāli Mahāvamsa, that enshrines certain understandings of the value of selves regarding the directive to not harm others.

Another text from the Khuddaka Nikāya, the Dhammapāda, can be well mined to shed light on our verse as Charles Hallisey demonstrates in this volume’s following chapter.19 Chapter 10 of the Pāli Dhammapāda begins with the following verses:

All tremble before violence.
All fear death.
Having done the same yourself,
you should neither harm nor kill.

All tremble before violence.
Life is held dear by all.
Having done the same yourself,
you should neither harm nor kill.

Whoever, through violence, does harm
to living beings desiring ease,
hoping for such ease himself,
will not, when he dies, realize ease.

19 *** check to see if Charlie focuses on chapter 12, “Oneself…” This is where we can understand the conception of self operative in the udāna verse.***
Whoever does no harm through violence
To living beings desiring ease,
Hoping for such ease himself,
Will, when he dies, realize ease.20

Both the Udāna and Dhammapada represent the same orientation around the self as the moral agent. The meaning begins with self-conception and understanding. It appeals to common sense – Do unto others, since you understand the experience; you know what it would be like, so don’t be violent. The Dhammapada shows that there is a reward for right behavior (non-harm) toward others, and no such reward for those who transgress. There was no such incentive suggested in the Udāna verse; one is expected to act in the right way purely on recognition of the equal experiences of self-interest among all individuals.

This companion text within the Khuddaka Nikāya sheds light on the meaning of our Golden Rule by means of comparison. We can also probe the meaning by consulting the commentarial tradition on our Udāna. Commentaries are widely employed in the Theravādin interpretation of texts.

While we might consider the prose narrative about King Pasenadi that precedes the inspired utterance as functioning as a preemptive commentary to prime the reader for its full effect, there is in fact an extensive commentary that explains and expands the context for such an utterance as well as the profound dharma lesson within its brevity. This commentary on the Udāna, the Paramatthadipani, is attributed to the prolific sixth century scholar-monk Achāriya Dhammapāla. In his commentary on what he refers to as

“the Great Chapter,” Dhammapāla parses the meaning of individual phrases and delivers further narrative context to help interpret the verse.

The narrative explains the origin of the relationship between queen Mallikā and the Kosala king Pasenādi, and is framed to answer the question, why did the king ask his queen if there is anyone else dearer than the self? The reciprocity implicit in the verse it seeks to explain finds a narrative precursor to prime the reader; in the prose we see that quite literally, one good turn deserves another. The story in the commentary goes as follows:

Mallikā had been the daughter of a lowly garland maker, who devotedly waited on the Buddha by offering him the cake she had intended to eat herself. After the Buddha had eaten, Ananda asked him “what ripening will there be of this gift of hers?” The omniscient Buddha prognosticates that before the day is out she will become the chief consort of the reigning king, Pasenādi. Later, upon seeing the king return from a hard day’s battle, “she did him a (good) turn,” presumably some good service. “The king, finding satisfaction in that (good) turn of hers, sent for her father, invested (her) with

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21 Masefield, 729.
22 Masefield, 729. Note that this question is phrased, characteristically, in terms of “ripening.” In the realm of karma, actions are like seeds that are planted, only later (perhaps in future lifetimes) will bear fruit. The organic metaphor is most common. Karmaphāla, vipāka…
23 The Pāli used for “did him a (good) turn” is vattam akāsi, which carries the semantic range of performing a service, doing her duty, “or perhaps even ‘proposed’ (from 2.√ vri (SED), to woo).” Here it may be worth quoting at length from the footnote of the translator for edification if not entertainment: “For at [Jātaka iii 406], she allows him to sleep with his head on her lap for awhile, after he had asked her whether or not she was married (Jiii 406). She was to prove to be not always faithful, if the episode involving the dog in the bath-house is anything to go by, as a result of which she was reborn for seven days, immediately following her death, in hell, during which period the Buddha had to stall until he could truthfully announce to Pasenādi that she had been reborn in heaven [Dhammapadatthakatha iii 119ff].”
great authority, had her subsequently conveyed to the inner palace, and installed her in the position of chief-consort.”

After a while, reflecting on the good he had done for her, the king begins to muse about how his queen might respond if he were to ask her “who is dear to you?” He anticipates that her response will be that she holds him most dear, which is his wishful thinking. As it turns out, because this queen was a savvy attendant on the Buddha and his sangha, she responds truthfully, rather than capitulating to the king’s obvious ego-driven compliment seeking. When she replies that there is no one more dear to her than herself, itself a challenge to the line of questioning initiated by the king, she goes further by turning the question back to him. He follows her lead and answers in the same fashion, but then he reflects:

I, who am king, ruler of the earth, indwell, after conquering it, this great circle of the earth as its owner. As far as I am concerned, it is fitting that I do not behold another dearer than the self. But this outcaste, being inferior from birth, (yet) who was installed by me in an exalted position, does not hold me, who am her lord, likewise dear. She says, face to face with me, that ‘The self alone is dearer’. How hard, truly, is this one”, and, having lost his self-possession, reproved her, saying: “Surely for you the Three Jewels are dearer”.

The queen’s response is telling. Even good intentions that seem altruistic in fact have roots in self-preservation, self-interest, and self-cultivation. She explains that while she holds the Three Jewels dear, she ultimately does so to secure for herself the benefits

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24 Masefield 729-30.
25 Community of monks.
26 The commentary suggests that the following rather conceived diatribe is due to the king’s “slow-witted nature.” (Masefield, 730). I can’t help but wonder about the utility of such an observation for the audience of this text. As an intellectually challenged protagonist, perhaps the character of king Pasenādi works for the audience as a sort of straw horse. The audience might reflect “I am not like that king,” … a good reader would want to count himself among the smart and virtuous.
27 Masefield, 729-30.
of a better rebirth along the long pathway of self-cultivation that ideally results in “the bliss of freedom.”

And this whole world holds another dear solely out of self-interest – even in wishing for a son, it wishes (for same) thinking ‘This one will nourish me in my old age’, for a daughter thinking ‘she will propagate the clan for me’, for a wife thinking ‘She will wait upon me (hand and) foot’, for other relatives, friends and kinsmen, too, by way of their various functions. Hence, it is in perceiving self-interest alone that this world holds another dear.

To explain the concluding line of the verse of uplift, and to conclude the commentary, the text delves into the shared fundamental nature of all human experience, namely that of dukkha, or dis-ease:

*Therefore one desiring self should not harm anther (tasmā na himse param attakāmo):* since each being holds the self dear in that way, is one desiring happiness for that self, one for whom dukkha is repulsive, therefore one desiring self, in wanting well-being of and happiness for that self, should not harm, should not kill, should not even antagonize with the hand, a clod of earth or a stick and so on, another being, upwards from and including even a mere ant or (other) small insect. For when dukkha is caused by oneself to some other, that (dukkha) is, after an interval of time, observed in one’s (own) self, as though it were passing over therefrom. For this is the law of karma.

Achāriya Dhammapāla represents one particularly authoritative voice in a vast tradition of commentarial literature. While the Pāli vāmsa texts are generally considered chronicles, or Buddhist histories, they can also be considered to participate in the same domain as the commentarial literature insofar as they appeal to narrative to edify on points of dhamma as well as aid in the transformation of the audience into moral agents capable of cultivating there own perfections. The narrative works hard in the vāmsas, especially in the fifth century Pāli Mahāvamsa, a text that conveys the Buddhist history of a particular place (Sri Lanka). It is to this text that we now turn to see how another

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28 Masefield 730.
29 Masefield 731.
30 Masefield 731-2. In a footnote, the translator explains that the word in the passage for “kill,” haneyya, is replaced in some manuscripts with the more general hileyya, “show hostility towards.” (Masefield, footnote 25, p.797).
layer of the interpretive tradition makes sense of the underlying goals of the Golden Rule. While the way it is phrased in the Udāna suggests that the non-harm decree is a universal (that all others should not be harmed, in all the quadrants of the world), the doctrine of non-harm (ahimsa) comes with a caveat for Sinhalese Buddhists mining the Mahāvamsa for an escape clause to the Golden Rule. In the twenty-fifth chapter (“The Victory of Dutthagāmani”), the conqueror-king Dutthagāmani has concluded a murderous battle against the Dāmila. He begins to feel remorse at having killed so many people (other beings) in battle, and so he solicits the comfort and advice of some monks:

And thereon the king said again to them: `How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?'

`From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!'32

The Golden Rule formulation in the Udāna can almost stand if the definition of a person is a narrow one, only a person who has entered the Buddhist path. The Udāna formula, “On traversing all directions with the mind, one finds no one dearer than oneself,” does not specify the types of other beings to which it refers. Within the context of its narrative, we see that it most certainly includes women, but Queen Mallikā and King Pasenadi are both supporters of the Buddhist sangha. The fifth-century compiler of

31 The text classifies the Dāmila as occupiers of what is rightfully a Buddhist land. Dāmila is often translated as Tamil, and this particular passage that eulogizes the violent victory of Dutthagāmani is still used as justification for the continued violence in contemporary Sri Lanka.
the Mahāvamsa appears to have found a loophole to the universal applicability of the Golden Rule.\textsuperscript{33}

**III. How does the Golden Rule work?**

We thus see that the social consequences of the Golden Rule formula depend on the operative definitions of self and other in each interpretive community. As we saw from the Paramathadipani commentary on the Udāna passage, the social consequence within the narrative is of central importance. In the narrative, the king is surprised that his beneficence towards one of a lower status, Mallikā, would not result in her finding him dear above herself. We see that the reason behind the non-harm statement crosses both social class and gender lines when Mallikā does not give the king the answer he anticipates. But Mallikā is not such an ordinary character because she is both a queen and a benefactor of the sangha. Can we deduce that the Golden Rule contained within the verse of uplift is intended to be applicable to all, regardless of caste or gender? As a sacred utterance, it carries the authority of the Buddha himself. We can only surmise it depends on the interpretation of self and other.

As we see from the Mahāvamsa passage, the universal applicability gleaned from within the Udāna text may not carry over into the interpretive communities of the text. Likewise, we should consider the location of these texts in the purview of monks. All sources consulted here are monastic in origin. The commentary that unlocks the social

\textsuperscript{33} It is well beyond the current project, but it would be interesting to think about the cryptic conclusion to this chapter of the Mahāvamsa:

“Should a man think on the hosts of human beings murdered for greed in countless myriads, and should he carefully keep in mind the evil (arising from that), and should he also very carefully keep in mind the mortality as being the murderer of all, then will he, in this way, shortly win freedom from suffering and a happy condition.” (Geiger, p.)
dimension of the Udāna was composed by a monk for the consumption by monks. A monk by definition leaves behind markers of status upon his renunciation. Likewise, he no longer is bound to fulfill hereditary gender roles once his life is given over in service to the sangha. What might it mean that within the Udāna narrative there is a lay female protagonist, but it is a story that is to be read and interpreted by male, monastic virtuosi?

The Golden Rule of the Udāna assumes that “the actor is an autonomous moral agent whose subjective and individual desires are the basis for the actions taken toward the other.”\textsuperscript{34} To determine how he wants or would want to be treated, the actor looks within and considers his own self-interest. Once perceived, he can project the quality of his own self-interest onto others. If we recall that in the Theravādin weltanschauung, any moral action carries positive, negative or neutral weight that directly impacts one’s self-interest in this life or an other, we can understand that the reason to do good to others is that it has consequences for the doer and the receiver. Keown explains this in terms of the transitive and intransitive effects of karma. There is a transitive effect of an action, for example, if I hit someone, it has a very palpable effect on this other person. But there is an intransitive dimension to the action of hitting someone else for the actor, namely, the accrual of demerit (pāpa) for such an unskillful, unwholesome (akusala) action. How you treat others is an extension of compassion or loving kindness, and is an opportunity to cultivate the self.\textsuperscript{35}

The Golden Rule as conveyed in the Udāna verse certainly includes reflexivity as a component of reciprocity, but in a less stable form than that found in the Judeo-Christian formulae. The reason is the unstable nature of the self. In Buddhism, the self is

\textsuperscript{34} From William Scott Green, Keynote, p.?? (III.b.)
a conventional designation that is used in the texts to refer to the moral agent, but there is a highly articulated sense of non-self (anatta) at the heart of the tradition. Each “self” is in fact a construct, a functional composite of the five aggregates. To simplify, there is no eternal or independent “self,” the self is only a heuristically useful designation.

Mapped onto the structure of karma, with all of the movement through various relationships a “self” will undergo, we see that the exchange of self and other is not a one-time proposition, but rather the nature of the universe. Constant change, flux, impermanence (anicca) applies to personhood as well as every other condition. The Golden Rule as it is formulated in the Udāna text represents a classic, middle way between deontology and utilitarianism, and within the context of karma, allows for the influence of both past and future actions and effects.

In Theravāda Buddhism, the Golden Rule is not equivalent to the precept to ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’” but rather “do no harm to your neighbor as you would do no harm to yourself.” Love and non-harm are separate paths of action, while they may stem from the same wellspring. The Golden Rule’s basic reference point is the actor rather

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36 Perhaps here use the chariot/King Milinda/Nagasena, Milindapanha as an example.
37 Explain the 5 khandhas, use:
   When all constituent parts are there,
   The designation ‘cart’ is used;
   Just so, where the five groups exist,
   Of ‘living being’ do we speak. (S. V. 10).
38 Perhaps the western philosophical category of virtue ethics comes closest to what is conveyed in the Theravada. Damien Keown writes:
   According to virtue ethics, of which Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a leading exponent, what is of primary importance in ethics are neither pre-existing obligations nor pleasant outcomes, but the development of character so that a person becomes habitually and spontaneously good. Virtue ethics seeks a transformation of the personality through the development of correct habits over the course of time so that negative patterns of behaviour are gradually replaced with positive and beneficial ones. The way to act rightly, according to virtue ethics, is not simply to follow certain kinds of rules, nor seek pleasant consequences, but first and foremost to be or become a certain kind of person. As this transformation proceeds, the virtuous person may well find that his or her behaviour spontaneously comes increasingly into line with conventional moral norms. (Keown, Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction, 23.)
than the recipient of the action. It does presuppose or even require empathy, but empathy should be considered a natural effect of the karmic shuffle of relationships. It is important to note, however, that the verse itself is only partly guide to action, and a general one at that. It is also a matter of fact, descriptive explanation of why one would act in non-harmful ways toward others.

The Udāna’s Golden Rule thus sanctions non-violence, and the converse is anathema. Presumably, if one hated oneself, one might resort to violence against others. But the expectation is that the reader would want to associate himself with the right minded agent, the doer of good and the cultivator of self.

**IV. Conclusion: How does the Golden Rule matter?**

While the particular utterance of the Golden Rule in the Udāna verse may not be central, it unquestionably captures the critical thread of the centrality of morality running through Theravāda thought and practice. The sentiment and moral lesson that can be drawn from the narrative context in which one finds the verse is also central, even if its particular articulation in the Udāna text seems to obscure it. As we saw in the introduction, the laws of karma and the workings of samsāra, the goal of eventual perfection, as well as the composite nature of the self are all prerequisite assumptions for the Udāna Golden Rule to make sense as a principle and a practice. The consequences of “ignoring, disobeying, or otherwise failing to implement the Golden Rule” are simple – the agent will pay for transgressions in future selfhoods. The benefits of following the Golden Rule may be eventual rather than immediate, but ultimately contributes to the perfection of the self and the opportunity of release from the binds of samsāra and continued rebirths.
The Golden Rule may be an admirable goal for all on their way through multiple lifetimes of cultivating the self, but it finds most resonance for the religious virtuosi, the monks for whom the texts are most readily accessible. The non-harm advocated in the Golden Rule resonates with a deontological aspect of Buddhist practice; taking the precepts marks one as a Buddhist, and the first precept is that of non-harm. It is a formal, ritualized precept, an outward acknowledgement of the responsibilities of a moral agent, and a voiced, explicit commitment to follow what is the implicit requirement of dhamma. Ahimsa, literally “non-harm” or “non-violence,” is one of the most fundamental Buddhist virtues. As with other apophatically phrased prescriptions in Buddhist rhetoric, non-harm is not simply the lack of doing harm, but is an active requirement of a moral agent.

39 “I undertake the precept to refrain from harming living creatures.” The first virtue phrased another way, quoted in Kalupahana p.73:

1. Refraining from taking life (panatipata), abandoning severe punishment (danda) and arms (sattha), being modest (lajji) and loving (dayapanna), extending friendliness and compassion to all living beings (sabbabhutahitanukampi). (p.73)
As soon as we start to ask about what is the Golden Rule in Buddhism and what is its utility or significance for Buddhists, we find ourselves confronting the very same conundrum of sameness-and-difference that we encounter whenever we explore the place of the Golden Rule more generally across the various religious traditions of the world: is the similarity among different versions of the Golden Rule more important than the differences among similar versions? Why are there differences, if there is similarity? Why is there similarity if there is difference? Is there a connection between the similarity and the differences? There should not be any surprise in this. On the contrary, we learn something important about the task at hand when we acknowledge that there is a parallelism between the study of the particular example of Buddhism and what we do as part of our comparative concerns. We see that there are challenges and responsibilities that we must take up if we are to do any sort of justice to our topic, whether we are considering the Golden Rule in a single religious tradition or whether we are considering the Golden Rule comparatively or philosophically.

What are we looking for when we look for the Golden Rule in Buddhism?

This conundrum of sameness-and-difference in the Golden Rule is, at one level, a descriptive issue and we can consider how this is so first. Buddhism, like the other religious traditions considered in this volume, is historically complex and internally
diverse. The Buddhist traditions, now found globally, began approximately 2,500 years ago in India and gradually spread across Asia. As complex religious heritages, the Buddhist traditions, both in the past and in the present, encompass an astonishingly diverse set of religious aspirations, ideas, practices, and institutions. The complexity and diversity of Buddhist ideals and practices, the richness of their character in local settings, are such that when Europeans first encountered Buddhists at the beginning of the colonial age, it took them quite a while to realize that the religion they saw in Sri Lanka was historically related to what they saw in Japan.

When we accept that historical and cultural diversity is actually constitutive of what we call Buddhism, we see that coming up with a single general description of the Golden Rule and its place in Buddhism, one that will be somehow uniquely representative of Buddhism as a whole or even as a system is impossible. The textual evidence alone is too inconsistent or is too resistant to a single scheme of organization for any generalization to be adequately representative, and this is before we begin to consider the even more challenging historical issues of texts received and interpreted in multiple contexts. It may actually be a good thing, in fact, that in the different Buddhist traditions the Golden Rule has not been the subject of sustained reflection in its own right, as it was in Christianity and Confucianism, since it means that we cannot avoid grappling with the historical and cultural diversity of Buddhism as part and parcel of our efforts to understand the Golden Rule in Buddhism by focusing only on one, albeit a systematic one, strand of thought about the Golden Rule.ii

Relevant to coming to terms with the constitutive diversity of Buddhism is Jeffrey Wattle’s suggestion that “[t]he golden rule, happily, 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. That is to say, very different statements and practices, each, on first sight, enormously different from others, can also be perceived as resembling each other as objects which fall under a single, if multivalent common category. The perceived resemblance—Wattles’ ‘continuity of meaning’ in the golden rule—is, somewhat ironically, what grounds our interest in the differences among these examples, which are described, compared with, and presented in the image of more familiar examples, much as South Asian languages can be described and taught on a grammatical model adopted from Latin, because of the assumption of a shared resemblance among all languages. What is perhaps most striking here is that when we see the Golden Rule in Buddhism, we can use the resemblance between what we see in Buddhist material and what we see in other religious traditions to draw attention to and to describe the differences between Buddhism and these other religious traditions. Thus, in a basic way, what we are looking for when we ask about the Golden Rule in Buddhism is how Buddhism is different.

As was said above, problems of interpretation that are found in comparative studies of the Golden Rule obtain when considering Buddhist materials alone. A simple example found in two important texts can illustrate the more complex historical issues at work here, even as it introduces us to a significant example of a formulation of the Golden Rule in Buddhism. In the Dhammapada, a Pali-language anthology of verses

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attributed to the Buddha and preserved by the Theravada traditions of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, we find the following often-quoted verse:

All are frightened of the rod.
For all, life is dear.
Having made oneself the example,
One should neither slay nor cause to slay.\textsuperscript{v}

The third line, “Having made oneself the example,” is what marks this verse as an example of the Golden Rule,\textsuperscript{vi} but let us postpone for the moment further consideration of the content of this verse as an example of the Golden Rule in Buddhism, apart from simply noting that its formulation is in the negative. We will see below that there are also positive formulations of the Golden Rule in the Buddhist traditions, but it does seem that negative versions, as in this verse, do prevail. In fact, this prevalence is so marked that Lambert Schmithausen has made the observation that “In the early canonical texts [of which the \textit{Dhammapada} is one]. . . , the focus is on avoiding wrongdoing. In the verse texts, emphasis is on killing or injuring, and in is only in the prose texts that the rule is explicitly extended to a wider range of wrongdoing.”\textsuperscript{vii}

Right now, however, let us simply note that an identical version of this verse occurs in the Sanskrit-language \textit{Udanavarga}, which, like the Pali-language \textit{Dhammapada}, is an anthology of verses attributed to the Buddha.\textsuperscript{viii} The \textit{Udanavarga} includes many of the same verses as the \textit{Dhammapada} and was translated into both Tibetan and Chinese. Despite the overlap in verses included in both anthologies, the \textit{Dhammapada} and the \textit{Udanavarga} are each organized by quite different thematic structures. Thus we find this particular verse grouped in the Pali \textit{Dhammapada} with other verses that refer to the use of “the rod” (\textit{danda}), including the immediately following verse:
Who with a rod does hurt
Beings who desire ease,
While himself looking for ease—
He, having departed, ease does not get.

And then later in the same chapter:

As with a rod a cowherd
To the pasture goads his cows
So does old age and death
Goad the life of living beings.\textsuperscript{ix}

In the \textit{Udanavarga}, this same verse is grouped with other verses that refer to what humans find “dear”(priya, as found in the second line, “For all, life is dear”), including the immediately following verses:

He who has been to a great distance and who returns from afar without mishap, his assembled kinfolk and friends receive him with joyful cries of ‘Alala!’

So likewise he who has been virtuous, on arriving from this world into another, his good works receive him like dear relatives and welcome him.\textsuperscript{x}

As well as earlier in the chapter:

From those things which are dear comes sorrow; from those things which are dear comes fear: if one casts off what is dear, he will be without sorrow, without fear.\textsuperscript{xl}

Anthologies are one important strand of the Buddhist interpretive traditions as important as commentaries, and it is worth noting that neither the \textit{Dhammapada} nor the \textit{Udanavarga} seem to take note of the third line of the verse, “having made oneself the example”, as central to the lesson of the verse, even though, with our interest in the Golden Rule here, may wish to focus on what Buddhists think about that notion. Rather than seeing the verse as providing instruction on how we can best take care of others, the anthologies, as interpretive traditions themselves, suggest that the verse was understood
as having greater relevance to questions about how we can take care of ourselves. The pattern of sameness-and-difference that connects and distinguishes the Dhammapada and the Udanavarga in their placement of the verse in their thematic-defined chapters further suggests that our own generalizations and interpretations of the verse as an instance of the Golden Rule overlaps with processes of generalization and interpretation engaged in by Buddhists themselves, even if particular generalizations themselves may be different.

The differences between the contextual import of this one verse in the Dhammapada and in the Udanavarga also reassures us that there is not an intrinsic problem with differences in generalizations and interpretations produced by contemporary students of Buddhism. Instead, these differences among Buddhist interpretations encourage us to expect confidently that generalizations about the Golden Rule in Buddhism, made by different contemporary students, will often, if not inevitably yield quite distinct, but equally valid accounts of the available evidence, simply because each generalization depends on the specific and numerous choices that are made by the student about which examples to select and how to connect them to each other and to their contexts. Moreover, as suggested above, the differences reveal something important about the material itself. The inclusion in this volume of two essays about the Golden Rule in Buddhism, the previous one by Kristin Scheible and this one, hopefully makes this important point of historical hermeneutics tangible, \textsuperscript{xii} even as it reinforces the significance of Wattles’ adverb ‘happily’ in his more-general observation, “The golden rule, happily, has more than a single sense.”\textsuperscript{xiii}

The difference in implicit interpretation of the same verse in the Dhammapada and the Udanavarga reminds us further that the conundrum of sameness-and-difference in
the Golden Rule is, at another level, a problem of the interpretive framework chosen and employed—hopefully, self-consciously—by Buddhist thinkers as well as contemporary students of Buddhism. As this level, the conundrum of sameness-and-difference is pre-descriptive. Indeed, it stands between and bridges our practices of description and analysis, belying any easy distinction that we might want to be able to make between them. This predescriptive level of the conundrum may be somewhat harder to see, but some comments by Charles Darwin in his *Descent of Man* can help us bring it into sufficient focus that we can describe its antipodes.

Darwin, early in a chapter in the *Descent of Man* on the “Moral Sense” among humans and animals, says,

> The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable—namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed as in man.

Darwin immediately adds that

> the social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them.

After giving support for his proposition with a variety of examples from animal life (as well as some racist asides typical of his day), Darwin then ends his discussion with the conclusion that

> the social instincts—the prime principle of man’s moral condition—with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise,’ and this lies at the foundation of morality.

What is significant about Darwin’s proposition is not actually its content, interesting as that may be, but the interpretive framework within which the proposition has its cogency in so far as it turns our attention to “the foundation of morality.” That
framework is foundational, in so far as it looks to the Golden Rule, its ubiquity in human testimony, to provide a major piece of evidence about the nature of human morality and especially to reveal a common foundation to human morality despite the obvious differences of ethical expression in various times and places. Darwin’s interpretive framework also seems to assume that this foundation will ground the authority, if not the truth, of human morality, itself, and allow us to take it as a guide for our own reflections on how to lead moral lives. It is the same interpretive framework, albeit one with a very different content, that informs the work of more recent commentators on the Golden Rule, such as Jeffrey Wattles and Donald Pfaff. Wattles says at the end of his book, *The Golden Rule*, that “The rule is an expression of human kinship, the most fundamental truth underlying morality" And, in his recent book, *The Neuroscience of Fair Play: Why we (usually) follow the Golden Rule*, Pfaff says

> For several years now, I have been reading far and wide in the literature of religions throughout the world, looking to answer just one question: “Can I find an ethical command that seems to be true of all religions, across continents and across centuries?” Well, I found one, and you’ll recognize it instantly. You probably know it as the Golden Rule. . . .

> Once I found abundant evidence for a universal ethical principle, I was convinced there must be a biological reason for it. My thinking ran like this: If this type of behavior takes place throughout human society, it must come from some trait in human biology—not something we tell another to do, but a feature, or, in biological terms, a mechanism, that exists in our physical being.

> For Darwin, Wattles, and Pfaff, the conundrum of same-ness-and-difference in the Golden Rule is recast as a question about how the Golden Rule is the expression of a human trait that is manifested variously.

> What are in play for us then are two different interpretive frameworks that can order our investigations of what is the Golden Rule in Buddhism and what is its utility or
significance for Buddhists, each framework engaging the conundrum of sameness-and-difference in a distinct way. The first framework privileges difference and, looks to discover what is distinctively Buddhist about the Golden Rule as it is found in the Buddhist traditions, the second privileges sameness and looks to discover what is human about the Golden Rule as it is used by Buddhists. But perhaps the first framework can be used to temper the second: is the case that Buddhists thought about ‘human kinship’ in the same way that Wattles—as well as perhaps most of us in contemporary North America—do?

‘Human Kinship’ and the Community Addressed by the Golden Rule

While it seems obvious that Buddhists made statements that can be described as examples of the Golden Rule, it seems less obvious that they always saw such statements as an expression of an already-given feeling of human kinship or even addressing a straightforwardly-defined human community. Instead, textual evidence suggests that Buddhists sometimes saw such statements and the notions articulated by them as tools that could help build community and fellow-feeling in the face of all-too-common human traits that threaten kinship and community. In this sense, Buddhists seem to have engaged the Golden Rule not as an expression of ‘human kinship’ but as a tool— in Darwin’s terms, a “habit”—to create this feeling. But to see how they thought so, we must first consider that Buddhists also seem to have drawn the boundaries of who was included in ‘human kinship’ in somewhat surprising ways.

The Dhammapada verse quoted above is one in a pair. The preceding verse in the pair is identical in all but the second line and we might see the next verse with its second line that ‘life is dear to all’ as a re-affirmation of the point of its counterpart:
All are frightened of the rod.
Of death all are afraid.
Having made oneself the example,
One should neither slay nor cause to slay.\textsuperscript{xviii}

The Pali commentary on this verse explains the last two lines “Having made oneself the example” by glossing “‘As I am, so are other beings,’—seeing thus, let one not strike another, nor get another struck [by someone else].\textsuperscript{xix} This gloss does seem to presume an awareness of an underlying ‘kinship’, a sameness in a defining experience, that can be used as a guide for actions, such as we might expect in any example of the Golden Rule in any religious tradition. The commentarial gloss to the verse on the expression “of death”, as something of which all are afraid, however, qualifies this idea of a ‘human kinship’ in two, quite significant ways:

\begin{quote}
In the discourse the wording admits of no exceptions, but the sense does. When a king proclaims by drumbeat that all should assemble, all do assemble except the princes and ministers of the state. In the same way, even though it is said that all fear [the rod and death], it must be understood that all are frightened except the following four; the thoroughbred horse, the thoroughbred elephant, the thoroughbred bull, and the influx-extinct [Arahant]. Of these, the influx-extinct does not fear [death and the like], not seeing a ‘being’ that can die, due to the fact that the notion of a substantial being [or self] is extinct [in such a one]. The other three are not frightened, not seeing a being [that can] become an adversary to them, due to the fact that the notion of self is very strong [in them].\textsuperscript{xx}
\end{quote}

The commentarial gloss distinguishes between two categories of beings for which the putatively-universal fear of death does not apply. The first is a set of animals who do not fear attack. In one sense, their exclusion from the cohort of those who live in fear is because of fault of the consciousness (an excessively strong sense of the wrong-view of Self because they are not troubled by a fear of predators); here the \textit{Dhammapada} commentary seems to be exploring the kind of worry raised by Wattles and Gert that any
application of the Golden Rule should not require “an agent to identify with the other in a simplistic and uncritical way.” More pertinent to our purposes at the moment is to recognize that the exclusion here of the thoroughbred horse, elephant, and bull presupposes an inclusion that is not always made by other familiar versions of the Golden Rule. The *Dhammapada* commentary, in line with what is found in other Buddhist texts and also what is found in Hindu and Jaina texts, includes within the objects of action based on the Golden Rule not just humans, but all sentient beings, including animals and sometimes even insects.

The other exclusion is uniquely Buddhist, but rather than expanding the community of kinship presupposed by the Golden Rule, as happens with the inclusion of animals, it draws the boundaries of the human community closer by excluding a certain class of humans. The *Dhammapada* commentary in singling out the “influx-extinct” excludes enlightened persons from inclusion within this community of those who fear death. The enlightened person is someone who cannot reflexively “make himself into an example” as this version of the Golden Rule recommends. The enlightened person, or *Arahant*, is free from the wrong views of self, and consequently is free of both desire and fear. The inclusion of animals and exclusion of the enlightened person addressed by the Golden Rule means that we cannot take this community to be, pure and simple, a human community. It is both more than human and less than human at the same time.

Precision about excluding the human Arahant from the community addressed by the Golden Rule is a frequent concern in the Buddhist commentarial traditions. The *Dhammapada* commentary on the other verse in the pair sees nothing to add to what it said about the previous verse except to use the line “For all, life is dear” as an occasion to
note that it does not include enlightened beings, an indication of the significance of this
idea for the commentator:

Life is dear and sweet to all beings other than the one in whom intoxicants [i.e. cognitive flaws and moral defilements] are extinct. The one in who intoxicants are extinct, indeed, is detached both in regard to life and in regard to death. The rest is as in the previous (stanza).

We see this concern to exclude the enlightened person from the community assumed by the Golden Rule throughout the Buddhist interpretive traditions, no matter what the school. What seems often to be at stake for Buddhist commentators on this version of the Golden Rule is the affirmation of a systematic consistency that will maintain other doctrinal positions on the nature of an enlightened person. This can be see in the following exchange between a Buddhist monk (Nagasena) and a king in the Theravadin Questions of King Milinda. The King speaks first:

Venerable Nagasena, this too was said by the Blessed One: “All men tremble at punishment, all are afraid of death.” But again he said: “The Arahat has passed beyond all fear.” How then, Nagasena? Does the arahat tremble with the fear of punishment? . . . If the Blessed One, Nagasena, really said that all men tremble at punishment, and all are afraid of death, then statement that the Arahat has passed beyond fear must be false. But if that last statement is really by him, then the other must be false. This doubled-headed problem is now put to you, and you have to solve it.

It was not said with regard to Arahats, O king, that the Blessed One spake when he said: “All men tremble at punishment, all are afraid of death.” The Arahat is an exception to that statement, for all cause for fear has been removed from the Arahat. He spoke of those beings in whom evil still existed, who are still infatuated with the delusion of self, who are still to be lifted up and cast down by pleasures and pains.

Schmithausen makes an important observation that this discussion in the Questions of King Milinda does not indicate whether there are ethical implications from excluding the premises of the Golden Rule with respect to the enlightened person. It may be the case, however, that this discussion about a particular Buddhist doctrinal point
displays something quite critical about the ethical utility of the Golden Rule for Buddhists.

The Golden Rule’s Assumed Community

To see this utility we need to be sure that we are clear about the community assumed by the Golden Rule in the Buddha’s statements in the Dhammapada/Udanavarga verses. It is not only a question of who is in or who is out of this community, it is also a question about what do the members of this community have in common. It is telling that the discussion about the verse in the Questions of King Milinda, as part of its exclusion of the enlightened person from the community to which the Golden Rule was addressed, says that the statement was made with reference to “those beings in whom evil still existed.” What we want to note carefully here is that the agent who is to use the Golden Rule is not one without natural dispositions, beyond perhaps reason, and definitely not one defined by good dispositions, as a simple appeal to our ‘social instincts’ or ‘human kinship’ might incline us to expect. Those who are to use the Golden Rule are defined by their cognitive flaws (which lead them to misunderstand themselves and others) and moral defilements (which make them willing to harm themselves and others). The vision of moral persons that seems assumed here is one of moral egoists as ardent in their pursuits as anything envisioned by Thomas Hobbes. Those who are not defined by this ardent egoism, namely enlightened persons, have no need of the Golden Rule; the foundation of their morality is otherwise, nor can their morality serve as a model for the rest of us.

Buddhist commentaries routinely provide a context for when the Buddha first taught a particular idea, and frequently the circumstances of teaching shed important light
on how the idea is to be understood and applied. The background context provided for this verse from the Dhammapada follows in the same vein as what we have just seen in the Questions of King Milinda, explaining that the verse was addressed to obviously imperfect people. Moreover, the contextual narrative construes an occasion that is not one in which people are asking what they should do, but one in which people have already harmed others:

All are frightened. This religious instruction was given by the Teacher while he was in residence at Jetavana with reference to the monks of the Band of Six.

For once upon a time, when lodging had been made ready by the monks of the Band of Seventeen, the monks of the Band of Six said to the former, “We are older; this belongs to us.” The Band of Seventeen replied, “We will not give it to you; we were the first to make it ready.” Then the Band of Six struck their brother monks. The Band of Seventeen, terrified by the fear of death, screamed at the top of their lungs. The Teacher, hearing the outcry, asked, “What was that?” When they told him, he promulgated the precept regarding the delivering of blows, saying, “Monks, henceforth a monk must not do this; whoever does this is guilty of sin.” Having done so, he said, “Monks, one should say to oneself, “As I do, so do others tremble at the rod and fear death.” Therefore one should not strike another or kill another.” So saying, he joined the connection, and preaching the Law, pronounced the following stanza,

All men tremble at the rod, all men fear death.
One should treat one’s neighbor as oneself and therefore neither strike nor kill. xxvii

Given what we have seen about the exclusion of the enlightened person from the cohort of people who use the Golden Rule, it is not surprising that this explanation of the Buddha’s initial preaching of this verse does not say that the Buddha, using the Golden Rule himself, promulgated the precept against violence between monks. There could be any number of reasons why the Buddha promulgated this precept; from his own annoyance at being disturbed to a concern at what others might say about his monastic order. It is also worth noting that the verse is not taught as an action-guide. The precept
itself is the action guide. Rather, what we see in this account is that the verse is
addressed to a group of people as something they can use to help them to observe this
precept when they have already demonstrated their inclination to violate it out of their
own self-interest. In other words, the verse is offered as a kind of “imaginative role
reversal”, to use Wattle’s terms, xxviii to aid adherence to a precept by persons who’s
dispositions direct them differently. The Golden Rule is not an aid to decision-making,
but is a device used in moral formation.

It is worthwhile making two further observations about this account before
continuing with a consideration of how the Golden Rule is utilized in moral formation.
First is the manner in which a particular law is supported, practically, by an appeal to a
moral universal. There is a curious relationship between legality and morality here. It is
not that the law is an expression of the universal moral position, since the precept is
promulgated quite specifically as being addressed to monks. It would seem then, and this
is the second observation, that this lack of isomorphism between precept and imaginative
role reversal allows for critical exceptions to the moral position that the imaginative role
reversal suggests. Monks are not to hit other monks, but that is not the same as saying
people are not to hit other people. In fact, some people are expected to hit other people in
the world as Buddhists often imagined it, and pre-eminently kings and their agents were
expected to do so. A king who drew the moral conclusion that the verse recommends,
eschewing violent punishment, because they themselves fear violence, would be an
ineffective king. Indeed, it is a king’s exploitation of his subjects’ fear of royal violence
that allows him to use violence less than he might otherwise.xxix
The Golden Rule and an Active Interest in the Well-being of Others

To this point, we have only discussed instances of the Golden Rule in Buddhist texts that are formulated negatively. There are also instances where the Golden Rule is formulated positively. One of the most important examples for our purposes here is found in the *Visuddhimagga*, a fifth-century manual for monks composed by the pre-eminent Theravadin thinker, Buddhaghosa. Looking at this example will help us to see that the manner in which the Golden Rule is embedded in a practical context of moral cultivation seems to take practitioner beyond what might be taken as the common sense implications of the Golden Rule.

[R]eflecting, “I am happy”, and “just as I desire to be happy, just as I am averse to suffering, just as I desire to live, as I desire not to die, so do other beings.” So having made himself into the example, a mind that has happiness and concern for other beings arises. This method is made clear by the following statement by the Lord:

> Having gone all around the world with the mind,
> No one more dear than myself was ever found.
> It’s the same for others, the self is dear,
> That’s why anyone who loves himself will not harm another.xxx

The practical context for this instance of the Golden Rule in the *Visuddhimagga* is a meditation that seems to recreate imaginatively a version of the contextual setting of the preaching of the verse from the *Dhammapada*, with its angry confrontation between two groups of monks. In the *Visuddhimagga*, this positive formulation of the Golden Rule occurs in a chapter that provides instructions on how to cultivate “an active interest in others” or “loving kindness” towards others (*metta*). Curiously, Buddhaghosa seems most interested in the chapter with how to dispel one’s anger towards a particular other that is an obstacle to the cultivation of feelings of universally-directed feelings of kindness and interest.
It should be known by a beginner even at the start that there are differences among persons, as it is said “An active interest (mettā) in these persons should not be cultivated first, and an active interest should never be cultivated in these.”

Indeed, this active interest in others (mettā) should not be cultivated at first with respect to four kinds of persons: a disliked person, a very dear person, someone towards whom one is indifferent, and an enemy. Nor should it be cultivated with respect to a particular person of the opposite sex. Nor with someone deceased.

Why shouldn’t an active interest in others be cultivated with respect to disliked persons first? Pretending to like someone who is disliked is exhausting. Pretending that a very dear friend is someone you have no feelings for is exhausting too, and when some suffering happens to him, it’s as if you could start crying. Putting someone you are indifferent to in a position of being respected or loved is exhausting. Anger arises just remembering an enemy. That’s why an active interest in others is not to be cultivated first with respect to disliked persons, etc. xxxi

Buddhaghosa structures his instructions on how to cultivate an active interest in others on a model of beginning with what is easy and then extending the moral emotions generated there to someone for whom it is difficult to have any feelings of interest in their happiness or to feel any kindness towards them. It is easy to wish good things for oneself, and Buddhaghosa recommends that a meditator begin with such wishes, but then use the imaginative role reversal that is part of the Golden Rule to extend these good wishes to others. Above all, what we see Buddhaghosa recommending here is to use the practice of an imaginative role reversal as a device to cultivate a habit of wishing others well, even—or, perhaps better, especially—those whom one does not like.

The Golden Rule here then is a mechanism utilized in a kind of moral engineering. It is not an expression of moral intuition grounded in human kinship nor a guide to action. This mechanism is employed precisely by persons who have dispositions and habits of the heart that actively prevent them from being well-disposed towards others.
Do Unto Others as They would Have You Do Unto Them

The pragmatic employment of a positively-formulated Golden Rule in Buddhaghosa’s instructions on cultivating an active interest in the well-being of others seems to suggest that here the Golden Rule should be understood as integrated in a much larger moral framework, much as the Golden Rule, in some Christian interpretations, the Golden Rule is integrated in an ethical framework of Love. To this extent, it seems that the actual rule that is operative is not one of reciprocity or fairness, but one of extravagant and unreciprocated generosity towards the other: “Do unto others what will make them happy.” The apparent problem is not with the intellectual cogency of the rule, but with the practical problem that the agent who aspires to this is also an ardent egoist, and can not help but pursue his own desires and wishes. It is the latter problem that Buddhaghosa addresses in his instructions on how to cultivate an active interest in others, and the imaginative role reversal is used as a device to know what will make others happy.

A moral logic of extravagant generosity which goes far beyond the fairness that common sense generally attributes to the Golden Rule seems at work in another Buddhist thinker’s instructions on how to get an ardent egoist to pursue the well-being of others.

Santideva is an early eighth-century Indian Buddhist thinker generally associated with the Mahayana traditions of Buddhism. His great work is the *Bodhicaryavatara* (Entering the Path of Enlightenment), and like the *Visuddhimagga*, it is a manual of training: And like the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Bodhicaryavatara* is addressed to ardent and self-destructive egoists, those who can ask, with Santideva,

Where can fish and other creatures be taken where I might not kill them?
And also conclude with him,

Though I have somehow come to a nigh unattainable place of advantage, and though I understand this, still I am led back to those selfsame hells once more.

I have no will in this matter, as if bewildered by spells. I do not understand. By what am I perplexed? Who dwells here within me? xxxii

Santideva’s concern in the Bodhicaryavatara is to give advice on how to transform oneself from a being destined for hell as punishment for one’s actions, and he recommends that one begin the process of transformation by reflecting on the equality between self and other that is the foundation of the Golden Rule. In the process, he suggests that the kinship between beings in the world is defined by the commonality of suffering and happiness:

At first one should meditate intently on the equality of oneself and others as follows: “All equally experience suffering and happiness. I should look after them as I do myself.

Just as the body, with its many parts from division into hands and other limbs, should be protected as a single entity, so too should this entire world which is divided, but undivided in its nature to suffer and be happy.

I should dispel the suffering others because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others too because of their nature as beings, which is like my own being.

When happiness is liked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I strive after happiness only for myself?

When fear and suffering are disliked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I protect myself and not the other? xxxiii

Santideva takes the insights that reflection on the commonality of suffering and the desire for happiness as a guide for action when he gives his version of the Golden Rule, “All beings equally experience suffering and happiness. I should look after them as I do myself,” and we should note that this formulation includes reflexivity without any
expectation of reciprocity. Santideva is acutely aware, however, that this action-guide is to be employed by an agent who is very skilled in taking care of himself and incapable of taking care of others. Santideva’s moral anthropology does not allow him to suggest otherwise, that a being defined by ignorance and evil disposition could suddenly become capable of acting in accordance with the insights of the Golden Rule. Instead, he recommends another practice of moral engineering, something which he calls, “the supreme mystery”: “the exchange of self and other.” “The exchange of self and other” is an intensification of the imaginative role reversal we have already identified in Buddhaghosa’s use of the Golden Rule in the cultivation of an active interest in others and which others have see in various utilizations of the Golden Rule in non-Buddhist traditions. It encourages the practitioner to simply take as literal fact the perspective afforded by the imaginative role reversal and to substitute the identity of another for one’s own. One remains the ardent egoist, but now all one’s cunning and energy in pursuing one’s own desires and interest are put in the service of another. We can see the results in the following verse, but it is important to remember that the “you” that is addressed is the person speaking, as is the “he” that is described, and the “I” is another, on behalf of whom the agent is only acting:

‘Do this! Stay like that! You must not do this! This is how he should be subjugated and punished if he disobeys.

‘Where are you off to? I can see you. I shall knock all the insolence out of you. Things were different before, when I was ruined by you.

Give up any hope that you will still get your own way. Unworried as you are by repeated molestations, I have sold you to others.”

What we see in Santideva’s hyperbole is a moral logic of extravagant generosity, one which seems very far from the moral logic of the Golden Rule itself, at least as it is
conventionally understood. Despite all its extravagance, however, Santideva’s use of the Golden Rule is consonant with much else that we have seen from the Buddhist traditions. Used by beings with intrinsic flaws, the Golden Rule’s helps them to become better than they have a right to be.

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iii Wattles, 5; quoted in William Scott Green, “Parsing Reciprocity: Questions for the Golden Rule” (unpublished manuscript, 2007), 5.

iv See Errington, 3.


All men tremble at the rod; to all men, life is dear
One should treat one’s neighbor as oneself, and should neither strike nor kill.

(E.W. Burlingmae, Buddhist Legends (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 295.)
Wattles identifies this verse as an example of the golden rule in Buddhism; see Wattles, 194, n. 3.

Lambert Schmithausen. “Problems with the Golden Rule in Buddhist Texts,” in Pramanakirtih: Papers Dedicated to Ernst Steinkellner on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday, Part 2, edited by Brigit Kellner et al. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 70.2. (Vienna, 2007), 796. I would like to thank Parimal Patil for providing me with a copy of this excellent essay. My dependence on Schmithausen’s work is basic throughout this essay.


Dhammapada X.3 (vs. 131) and X.7 (vs. 135), translation from Carter and Palihawadana, 203, 205.


This point would be further reinforced by considering the generalizations about the Golden Rule found in Lambert Schmithausen. “Problems with the Golden Rule in Buddhist Texts,” (See n. 3).

Wattles, 5.


n.b. how Wattles’ notion of human kinship echoes, but is really quite different from Darwin’s ‘social instincts.’ For Darwin, the social instincts are what keep us with our intimate others—our families—while for Wattles, what is at stake is the ‘human family’, as such.


It is worthwhile noting, perhaps, that this pair is not found in the Udanavarga.


Wattles, 7; for Gert, see Green 2.

See, for example, Schmithausen’s reference to the commentary on the Udana: “That even small animals like insects are included is confirmed by Ud-a 275, 23-24, where the range of beings not to be killed or injured expressly includes even kunthas [a kind of small insect] and ants.” (Schmithausen, 798-99).

There is a significant inconsistency in the texts here. This Dhammapada verse excludes the Arahant from having the requisite conditions for turning oneself into an example because the Arahant does not fear death. Other instances of Buddhist statements that can also be taken as instances of the Golden Rule do include “sages”, that is Arahants, within community addressed by the Rule, simply by omitting fear of death or the dearness of life as the condition for the requisite empathy. For example, a verse
common to both the Pali-language Suttanipata and the Sanskrit-language Mahavastu says:

   Regarding others like yourself and yourself like others
   Cause no one to be harmed or killed.

(Suttanipata vs. 705; Mahavastu III. 375).

xxiv Carter and Palihawadana, 203.

xxv Schmithausen provides a valuable account of discussions in Mahayana texts, in particular, including the Chinese Mahaprajnaparamita Upadesa and the Mahaparinirvanasutra in its Tibetan and various Chinese versions, on the undesired consequences implied by the expression of the Golden Rule in Dhammapada 129 and 130. It is obvious from these discussions that commentators were at pains to exclude the enlightened person from the cohort of those who might use this version of the Golden Rule to guide action and also from the cohort of those who might be the objects of actions guided by the same version of Golden Rule. The Mahayana Mahaparinirvanasutra goes so far as to portray Manjusri criticiing the Buddha for using in Dhammapada 129/130 universal, unrestricted statements when there are exceptions (Schmithausen, 804).


xxvii Burlingame, 2.294.

xxviii Wattles, 132.

xxix On the normative violence of kings in Buddhism, see Steven Collins,, Nirvana, and Other Buddhist Felicities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chapter 6.

xxx Visuddhimagga IX.10; the verse quoted is found at Samyutta I.75 and Udana 47.

xxxi Visuddhimagga IX.4-5.

xxii Santideva, Bodhicaryavatara, translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford University Press, 1998), 34, 27.

xxiii Crosby and Skilton, 96.

xxiv Crosby and Skilton, 103.
12.

A HINDU GOLDEN RULE, IN CONTEXT

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“The Golden Rule or the ethic of reciprocity is found in the scriptures of nearly every religion,” we are told in the anthology, *World Scriptures* (1991: 114). This hefty volume, a project of the International Religious Foundation published in 1991, provides an assemblage of quotations from diverse religious texts and teachings from many of the world’s religions, arranged in a topical format. So under the rubric “Golden Rule,” one may find the most familiar formulation from the Christian gospel of *Matthew*, “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them,” along with similar quotations from Judaic, Islamic, Confucian, and Yoruba scriptures.

Within this framework, we learn that India of the classical period also had the Golden Rule, for the anthology provides quotations from early Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu texts. According to the ancient Jain collection, the *Sutrakritanga*, “A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated (1.11.33).” The early Buddhists are represented by a passage from the *Sutta-nipata*, one of the earliest compilations of teachings ascribed to the Buddha, which asserts: “Comparing oneself to others in such terms as ‘just as I am so are they, just as they are so am I,’ he should neither kill nor cause others to kill.” And for the Hindus, a passage from the vast epic poem *Mahabharata* is offered: “One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire (*Anusasana-parvan* 113.8).” All these passages extol a reflection on the identity or equality of other beings and oneself, and promote a course of conduct towards others that is non-harmful based on that understanding of identification.

When we consider the role of the Golden Rule in the world religions, however, determining that these religions *have* such a statement somewhere within their copious textual canons is less important than assessing what role such statements might play within their dominant ethical formulations and commitments. We may gain perspective on this if we keep in mind that all statements such as those collected in the *World Scriptures* are made by particular speakers in the course of longer discourses, addressed to specific audiences. The speakers articulate these discourses within, and sometimes against, the normative background of their own societies and their broader understandings of the world.

Indic formulations of the Golden Rule such as those collected in the *World
Scriptures anthology repeatedly point towards an ethical principle that is much more significant within classical Indic ethical discourse, namely the principle of ahimsa, non-harming or non-violence. To apprehend the other as oneself, for Indian religious thinkers of this time, leads to conduct that avoids actions harmful to others. The anthology cites another early Buddhist text that spells this out quite clearly:

The Ariyan disciple thus reflects, Here I am, fond of my life, not wanting to die, fond of pleasure and averse from pain. Suppose someone should rob me of my life... It would not be a thing pleasing and delightful to me. If I, in my turn, should rob of his life one fond of his life, not wanting to die, one fond of pleasure and averse to pain, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to him. For a state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must also be to him also; and a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?

As a result of such reflections he himself abstains from taking the life of creatures and he encourages others so to abstain, and speaks in praise of so abstaining. *(Samyutta Nikaya* 353, cited in *World Scriptures* 1991: 115)

So the Buddha advises his audience, here the “Ariyan disciple” or one who has renounced society to become a follower of the Buddha. The principle of ahimsa certainly is fundamental within the ethical universe of the Jains, and to a large extent this is shared by the Buddhists. However, for Hindus ahimsa is a more problematic notion, one that cannot be easily taken as a universal normative ethical principle.

In this paper I will take the quotation from the *Mahabharata* offered by the *World Scriptures* as the representative Hindu formulation of the Golden Rule, and sketch out its location within the text from which the anthology has isolated it. I do this not to undercut the value of the anthology, but to show how the contextual understanding of the passage can lead us to a more complex understanding of how the Golden Rule may have operated within a classical Hindu setting. Before we return to the *Mahabharata*, however, I will make a few preliminary remarks about Hindu ethical discourse.

**Hindu Dharma and Hierarchical Ethics**

The dominant mode of ethical thinking in classical India revolves around the term dharma, a word that takes on a variety of meanings. It can be construed both as an overarching cosmic order and as a set of guidelines for proper righteous conduct by individual persons. Hindu formulations pertaining to dharma assume a hierarchical social order, in which segmented social groups (later called “castes” by Western observers) are differentiated and ranked according to various criteria. In such a social setting, the primary goal of ethical thinking does not involve egalitarian reciprocity as an ideal. Rather, the challenge for ethical discourse is to determine the proper modes of interpersonal conduct in the myriad situations arising in everyday living where persons of differing ranks come into relation with one another. What are one’s duties or responsibilities towards another person of different social status? Considerations of age, gender, and social rank must all be taken into complex consideration. Reciprocity cannot be a reliable guide when one person’s responsibilities towards another are determined or inflected by an unequal relationship.

To illustrate hierarchical ethical thinking, I will look at one brief example, namely Manu’s treatment of marital relations. One of the finest and most influential presentations of orthodox or brahmanical hierarchical ethics may be found in the
Manavadharmasastra, "Manu’s treatise on dharma." Roughly contemporary with the Mahabharata, this work presents an orthodox brahmanical vision of dharma as an overriding cosmic principle that shapes the social order as an organic whole, and it provides detailed guidance for persons of all classes in how they ought best to act within this ideal social world. It presents social divisions of age, gender, and class as aspects of the natural order that ultimately derives from the shape of creation.

According to Manu, a female should never enjoy an independent status. A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her own house. In childhood a woman should be under her father’s control, in youth under her husband’s, and when her husband is dead, under her sons’. She should not have independence. (MS 5.147-148)

Manu’s assertion is reinforced later when he considers the respective dharma of husband and wife.

I will tell the eternal duties of a man and wife who stay on the path of duty both in union and separation, Men must make their women dependent day and night, and keep under their own control those who are attached to sensory objects. Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence (MS 9.1-3)

Passages such as these illustrate the element of misogyny in Manu, but they also point to a conception of marital relations that involves both inequality and unity. The wife, in Manu’s vision of dharma, is subordinate and subservient to her husband. He is her lord (pati), and she considers service to her lord as her vow (pativrata). Reciprocally, the husband is required to offer protection to his wife.

Regarding this as the supreme duty of all classes, husbands, even weak ones, try to guard their wives. For by zealously guarding his wife he guards his own descendents, practices, family, and himself, as well as his own duty. (MS 6.6-7)

Through the observance of these mutual and complementary duties towards one another, husband and wife become one.

When a woman is joined with a husband in accordance with the rules, she takes on the very same qualities that he has, just like a river flowing down into the ocean. (MS 9.22)

Male and female are different categories of beings, whose duties derive from the positions their gender assigns them. Yet these unequal duties form an organic whole, in this case the marital unit, the basis of the household. So too, in Manu’s treatise on dharma, members of different classes (varna) have unequal status and distinct social duties, which together compose an integrated hierarchical social order. Along the same lines, kings and subjects have complementary functions that allow a harmonious state. Manu outlines the necessary role of the king, as lord (pati), in protecting the realm and maintaining an orderly society.

A ruler who has undergone his transformative Vedic ritual in accordance with the rules should protect this entire (realm) properly. For when this world was without a king and people ran about in all directions out of fear, the Lord emitted a king in order to guard this entire (realm), taking lasting elements from Indra, the Wind, Yama, the Sun, Fire, Varuna, the Moon, and (Kubera) the Lord of Wealth. Because a king is made from particles of these lords of the gods, therefore he
surpasses all living beings in brilliant energy, and, like the Sun, he burns eyes and hearts, and no one is able to even look at him. (MS 7.2-6)

The social world envisioned by Manu is thoroughly hierarchical. Harmonious order arises when the various categories of beings recognize and conduct themselves according to the own proper responsibilities within this integral world. The aim of Manu’s treatise, accordingly, is to set out those differentiated principles and guidelines that constitute dharma.

Within the hierarchical ethical framework outlined by Manu, especially for male members of the brahmin class but also pertinent to all others, the Golden Rule does not make much sense. It is not useful for a husband, in Manu’s world, to use the principle of reciprocity in doing to his wife as she would do to him, for their duties and responsibilities towards one another are incommensurate.

Yudhisthira’s Dilemma and Brhaspati’s Unhelpful Response

If that is the general case, then where does the teaching of the Golden Rule articulated in the Mahabharata and cited by World Scriptures fit in?

The quotation comes in the context of a lengthy instructional session involving Yudhisthira, Bhisma, Brhaspati, and several other teachers, at the conclusion of the great eighteen-day war at the center of the Mahabharata. Yudhisthira is the eldest of the five Pandava brothers, and Bhisma stands as surrogate grandfather to him. (The actual relationship between the two is too complex to spell out here.) Both are members of the ruling warrior class, ksatriyas. Although kinsmen, they have fought on opposite sides in the war, with Bhisma serving as general for the enemy Kaurava forces during the first nine days of the battle. The third member of the discussion, Brhaspati, is identified as the priest of the gods, and appears only briefly within the session. Brhaspati, we will see, is the one who articulates the Golden Rule.

At the conclusion of the hostilities the five Pandava brothers have emerged victorious, but at a terrible cost. Nearly the entire ksatriya class of India has been exterminated in battle. By one estimate, some figures persons have died over the course of the eighteen days. The eldest Pandava, Yudhisthira counts himself personally responsible for the war and for the deaths of all these noble warriors. What makes this even more devastating for him is that among the victims are many of his closest relations, such as his cousins, his sons, his uncles, and his teachers. One of the defeated warriors on the other side, Bhisma lies dying on a bed of arrows. Earlier, however, he has earlier received a boon from the gods that allows him to choose the time of his final demise. At first Yudhisthira is so overcome with grief (soka) that he refuses to assume the sovereignty that he has won through the war. Instead, he proposes to become a renouncer and retire to the mountains to expiate his terrible guilt. Others persuade him to accept the burden of kingship. However, he continues to mope about in despair until finally his friend Krishna persuades him to ask Bhisma for advice. Yudhisthira states his dilemma succinctly for Bhisma: “Those who know dharma hold that kingly rule is the very highest dharma, but I think it is a great burden.” (MBh 12.56.2)

Close as he is to death, Bhisma nevertheless agrees to speak with Yudhisthira, in hopes of pacifying the ruler’s debilitating grief. Bhimsa’s teachings are extensive. They occupy two books in the Mahabharata, the Santiparvan and the Anusasanaparvan, and run to some 37,800 lines of verse, roughly equal to the length of
the complete Christian Bible. Initially Bhima instructs Yudhisthira in the duties of kingship (*rajadharma*). Here he seeks to persuade Yudhisthira that kingship is necessary to the order of the world, and that violence, while regrettable, is a necessary part of a king’s responsibilities. However, even at the conclusion of Bhima’s lengthy teachings on kingship, Yudhisthira declares that he still has not regained peace of mind. His conscience is still full of guilt on account of the terrific violence of the great battle between Pandavas and Kauravas. Bhima continues his discourse, therefore, and seeks with a new set of more religious teachings to bring some sort of solace to his morose interlocutor.

In the course of these teachings, Yudhisthira asks Bhima questions of eschatology. What determines where humans go after they die, he wonders? When one’s soul abandons the dead body like a piece of wood or a clod of earth, he asks, what is it that transmigrates to the next world? At just this moment the preceptor of the gods, Brhaspati, appears on the scene, and so Bhima respectfully proposes that they pose this question to their distinguished visitor.

Brhaspati initially stresses that a person is born alone and dies alone. Through all the vicissitudes of life, one has no ultimate companion. When a man dies, observes Brhaspati, all his relatives may mourn the deceased for a moment, but then they quickly turn around and go their own ways. Relatives clearly do not follow one into the next life. Here Brhaspati’s teachings appear to be aimed at the special grief Yudhisthira feels about the death of his own kinsmen in the war. The ties of family relationship, Brhaspati emphasizes, are not ultimate ones.

However, one thing does accompany the transmigrating soul, Brhaspati continues, and that is *dharma*. The moral quality of one’s actions in one lifetime follow one to the next, and determine what that next one will be. This is the classical Indic notion of *karman* (a term that denotes both a person’s actions and the moral consequences of those acts that may adhere to one), and in the world of the *Mahabharata* it is broadly accepted as part of the world-order. A living being who has acted according to *dharma* will go to the highest heaven (*svarga*), Brhaspati stresses, while one without *dharma* will go to a hell (*naraka*).

This cannot be a great reassurance to Yudhisthira, who continues to believe that he has committed extremely sinful actions in the course of the war. Therefore Yudhisthira immediately asks Brhaspati how one may become freed from past sins. Brhaspati proposes gift-giving as one way of repenting, and thereby gaining an auspicious end, but this still does not satisfy Yudhisthira. So the Pandava king lists several different proposals for virtuous expiatory action and asks Brhaspati to advise him which is best. “Non-violence (*ahimsa*), Vedic rites, meditation, restraint of the senses, asceticism, and service to one’s teacher—which of these is best for the soul? (*Mbh* 13.114.1)” Brhaspati begins by asserting that all six are good.

All of these individually are doors of *dharma*, completely; all six of them are praiseworthy. But now listen, and I will tell you what is the highest most excellent route for the living being. That man who follows the *dharma* taking recourse to non-violence (*ahimsa*) attains the highest end (*Mbh* 13.114.2-3). Among all virtuous “doors of *dharma*,” Brhaspati singles out the first in the list, *ahimsa*, and goes on to articulate his version of the nonviolent Golden Rule.
A person who strikes down non-violent creatures (bhuta) with his weapon, out of a desire for his own happiness, does not go to a happy end when he passes on. But a person who adopts towards all creatures the attitude that they are similar to oneself (atmopama), who puts down his weapon and conquers his anger, does obtain happiness when he passes on to the next life (Mbh 13.114. 5-6)

Let us pause here to note one important extension in the Indic theory of non-violence. Much like the contemporary Jains, Brhaspati does not restrict the Golden Rule principle of reciprocity and non-violence to human creatures; this rule encompasses all creatures. This is a natural extension of the idea of transmigration, since all living creatures are believed to be linked in a fluctuating cycle of transmigration (samsara). In fact, Brhaspati has explained in considerable detail just previously how sinful acts in this lifetime may lead to rebirth as animals. Brhaspati is quite strict about this, especially with brahmins who fail in their duties. For instance, a Vedic brahmin who offers sacrifices on behalf of someone who is not qualified for this becomes, in his next life, a worm for fifteen years. Then he takes birth for five years as an ass, then as a hog, a cock, and a jackal. Next he takes birth as a dog, and finally he regains in the following life his status as a human. Such a viewpoint is certainly intended to make the brahmin careful in calculating those for whom he offers his sacrifices, but it also leads one to see the worm, ass, hog, cock, jackal, and dog as bearing a soul that may well have been human, even a brahmin, in the past and may in the future become human once again.

Brhaspati goes on to spell out the full implications of this principle of “similarity to self” (atmopama).

That which is contrary to oneself, one should not do to another. This is the rule of dharma in its brief form. Other actions derive from selfish desire (kama). In making gifts and in denying them to others, in pleasure and in pain, in what is agreeable and what is not agreeable, a person should evaluate one’s actions through comparison with one’s self. As one may behave towards another, so the other behaves towards the first. In the world of the soul (jiva), let the other person be the likeness (upama) of yourself. Thus dharma is conveyed completely. (Mbh 13.114.8-10)

Here Brhaspati appears to adopt a formulation of reciprocity that parallels the various versions of the Golden Rule found around the world: one should regard the other as like oneself, and use this as a guide to one’s own conduct towards that other. This is the formulation that the World Scriptures anthology has singled out as the Hindu Golden Rule. And Brhaspati makes it clear by his final statement that he sees this teaching as a self-sufficient and universal principle for virtuous conduct.

Brhaspati contrasts actions based on similarity to self, which he considers dharma, with other actions deriving from kama. Here Brhaspati restates an ethical premise widely shared in classical Indian discourse. Selfish or self-interested desire (kama) is the adversary of righteous or responsible moral conduct. Although ethical instructors like Manu recognize the fundamental role of self-interest in motivating action, none would advocate self-interest as a sufficient guide for conduct or as the basis for a system of morality. Rather, Manu and others point to the relentless power of kama, especially when it is indulged.
Desire is never extinguished by the enjoyment of what is desired; it just grows stronger, like a fire that flares up with the oblation (of butter) and burns a dark path. (*MS 2.94*)

Manu, Brhaspati, and other Hindu moralists, along with their Jain and Buddhist counterparts, all advocate restraint (*tyaga*) of *kama* as the foundation of righteous action or *dharma*. Brhaspati’s distinctive position is to suggest “similarity to self” as the basis for this self-restraint.

In the context of a social ethics generally grounded on an assumption of hierarchy among living creatures, however, this teaching is bound to appear radical. If the social order is profoundly hierarchical, what can be the basis for regarding others as similar to oneself? Brhaspati’s use of the two terms *atman* and *jiva*, both of which are often used in early Hindu texts to designate the transmigrating soul or spirit, point to a deeper level of similarity or equality. While orthodox brahmin treatises on *dharma* like that of Manu presuppose the stratified order in which humans must act as social beings, classical philosophical texts such as those of the Upanisads and the *Vedanta-sutras* of Badarayana provide on a more profound analysis of the human situation. These texts seek to identify the most fundamental aspect of the human being, and they use terms like *atman* and *jiva* to designate an underlying animating spirit that inhabits a body, transmigrates from that body upon death, and then comes to be reborn into a new body. This transmigrating *atman*, they postulate, cannot be identified with any of the material or worldly aspects of the body or its social situation. Some Indian philosophers push this idea towards a monist metaphysical position. There are not multiple monad-like spirits, but rather a single imperishable and universally shared Self (called *brahman*), of which all individually-embodied souls (*atman*) are aspects. Social differences are extrinsic, socially constructed. This non-dualistic philosophical position, later articulated within the Advaita Vedanta school of thought, provides the basis for a deeply reciprocal principle of conduct, which Brhaspati presents in his teachings as the idea of “similarity to self.”

It should be noted that philosophical teachings of the imperishability of the transmigrating soul do not necessarily lead to an ethics of non-violence. In an earlier set of teachings in the *Mahabharata* that takes place just before the war, namely the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna uses the same idea to separate the Pandava warrior Arjuna from his disinclination to fight. Arjuna is concerned precisely with the prospect of having to face his own relatives in battle, and threatens to put down his weapons. To persuade Arjuna that he should fight Krishna stresses that he will not be killing the souls or spirits of the opposing warriors. Those souls are imperishable, and will move on to other bodies in other worlds, according to their own conduct within this world. All a warrior can destroy in battle are the bodies of his enemies. He need not grieve over his actions. The idea of a permanent transmigrating soul and of a universally shared Self can lead to a redefinition of death that reduces or relativizes moral culpability in the act of killing. Brhaspati’s teachings, however, draw on the same underlying soul-theory to support an ethic of reciprocal non-violence.

Lest we rest on Brhaspati’s teachings of reciprocity and non-violence, compelling as they are, as constituting a Hindu Golden Rule of universal application, let us return to the scene as the *Mahabharata* relates it. When Brhaspati has conveyed *dharma* completely, at least from his own point of view, he abruptly takes leave of
Yudhisthira and Bhism and rises upwards into the sky. He is, after all, preceptor to the gods and must return to continue his services there. Yudhisthira makes it clear that Brhaspati’s teachings have made a strong impression on him.

Sages, brahmins, and gods in their great wisdom all praise that dharma characterized by non-violence, on account of its Vedic authority. (Mbh 13.115.2)

But Yudhisthira also indicates that Brhaspati’s instructions have not spoken to his own concerns. The teachings of non-violence may be all well and good for gods, sages, and brahmins, but they do not suffice for a ksatriya ruler who necessarily performs violent duties in the interest of preserving the social order.

However, how does a person who has committed violence through actions, words, or thoughts free himself from sorrow? (Mbh 13.115.3)

Yudhisthira seems to view Brhaspati’s speech as that of a visiting lecturer who has given a very impressive talk which has failed to address his own burning question. Brhaspati’s intervention is like that of a pacifist lecturing soldiers suffering from PTSD on the ethics of non-violence, when what the soldiers need is a way to pacify their anxiety and guilt. Like a hospitalized soldier, Yudhisthira has committed violent atrocities, according to his own understanding, and Brhaspati’s articulation of the Golden Rule does not help him gain liberation from the remorse that fills his being.

As a ksatriya and powerful warrior responsible for the death of many opponents, Bhisma has a better grip on the particular ethical quandaries of rulers and warriors than does a priest, even the preceptor of the gods. Renunciation of worldly responsibilities is not an appropriate response, Bhisma argues, for rulers must act in order to protect their subjects and maintain the social order. That is their duty, their particular dharma. Such action will inevitably involve violence and harm to some creatures.

Yudhisthira’s dilemma is how to gain respite from the grief arising from the violent actions he and his brothers have committed in pursuit of what they considered their duty as ksatriyas. Bhisma’s answer, once Brhaspati is safely out of the way, is to advocate a more limited form of ahimsa, which even worldly rulers can safely observe: one should avoid eating meat. Eating the meat of other creatures, Bhisma explains, is like eating the flesh of one’s own son. (Here too transmigratory thinking seems to underlie Bhisma’s hyperbole.) The problem lies not just with the violence entailed in killing other living beings for food, he goes on, but also in the way meat-eating engenders attachment. As the tongue is the cause of the knowledge or sensation of taste, so, the scriptures declare, attachment proceeds from taste. Well-dressed, cooked with salt or without salt, meat, in whatever form one may take it, gradually attracts the mind and enslaves it (Mbh 13. 115.11-12)

To renounce the eating of meat, therefore, allows one to avoid enslavement to sensory desire, and Bhisma suggests it is a practical way for a ksatriya ruler to expiate the emotional pangs he may feel over the other acts of violence he necessarily commits in the course of his royal duties.

Conclusion

When we look at this formulation of the Hindu Golden Rule in its larger textual setting, we see that Brhaspati’s teaching connects the principle of reciprocity with other key ideas in classical Hindu discourse, such as transmigration, non-violence, and the metaphysics of the atman. We see also that, in its broader context, his teaching is a
Brhaspati grounds his teaching of ethical reciprocity in the concept of a transmigrating soul or spirit, whose destiny is determined by the moral quality of the person’s conduct. Among the various forms of virtuous conduct, Brhaspati singles out non-violence or *ahimsa* as the most efficacious. One should regard others as “similar to oneself,” and avoid doing harm to them on the basis of that similarity. Harmful actions grow out of selfish desire, and desire is the great enemy of *dharma*. The recognition that others are like to oneself, on the other hand, rests on a deeper understanding of the similarity or (in its Advaita formulation) unity of transmigrating souls, all equally caught up in the fluctuating world-process.

As preceptor to the gods, Brhaspati is an authoritative instructor in *dharma*, and his audience recognizes the virtue in his teaching. However, Yudhisthira and Bhisma also consider that it is limited in its scope of application. The burden of Bhisma’s lengthy session with Yudhisthira is to provide guidance for a ruler to exercise sovereignty in a non-egalitarian social world. This requires non-reciprocal actions where a sovereign treats subjects and other rulers in ways he would definitely not have himself treated. It requires violence to preserve order. There may indeed be some—“gods, sages, and brahmins,” as Yudhisthira puts it—who are in a position to conduct themselves according to a disciplined principle of reciprocity and non-violence towards all other creatures. This is a radical extension of common Hindu ethical teachings. For most persons caught up in worldly pursuits, however, from rulers on down, other moral teachings are more pertinent: the avoidance of desire-based conduct, the minimization of injury towards others, and the recognition of *dharma* in all interpersonal encounters.