

THE TARNISHED GOLDEN RULE (LUKE 6:31): THE INESCAPABLE RADICALNESS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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[Editor's note: Jesus' Golden Rule has been inaccurately described as a form of retribution. In fact it is a moral maxim of complete mutuality whose positive form lays bare human desires for the Infinite. Jesus summons us to a general altruism that is possible only for sons and daughters of an infinitely altruistic God. Thus the Golden Rule is unique to Jesus, is grounded in his filial relation to God, and forms the basic insight which both exegetes and ethicists can elaborate into a world-transforming morality.]

WHETHER THEY BEGIN from natural-law principles or from a proportionalist calculus, articles on Christian ethics rarely reflect the extraordinary demands of Jesus' ethics, especially as these are presented in the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain.

Surprisingly, this same lack is increasingly found in biblical exegesis. Recent work on the Sermon is more likely to investigate the social situation of Jesus or of the evangelist's community, or to investigate the roots of Jesus' tropes in classical rhetoric than to wrestle with his exigent ethics. The Golden Rule especially has been turned into the rehearsal of a Greco-Roman commonplace, and so has lost its extraordinary power as an example of *imitatio Dei*.

This article proposes to uncover and correct some of the exegetical oversights which have led to this obfuscation, and thus to engage exegetes and theologians in illuminating the paradoxical and penetrating power of Jesus' ethical demands. And so it prepares a two-fold enterprise: to enrich the present thinness of New Testament ethics, and to engage exegetes and Christian ethicists collaboratively in providing the power of Jesus' thought to contemporary Christian life.

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THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Jesus' formulation of the "Golden Rule" is found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.¹ From the time of Grotius, Wetstein, and Resch, biblical scholars have collected texts from ancient literature which seem to adumbrate Jesus' own formula.² This research has so strictly located Jesus' maxim in the thought-world of his time that it has lost what previous generations of exegetes called its revolutionary character. Recently, however, H. D. Betz has called into question many of the assumptions on which the modern interpretation has been based.³ It is opportune to study the issue anew.⁴

The Golden Rule was not submitted to systematic analysis until Albrecht Dihle's classic work in 1962.⁵ Dihle rooted it in the oldest norm of human conduct, the principle of retribution (*Vergeltungsprinzip*). The most severe form of this principle, found in primitive law and primitive morality, was the *lex talionis*. A wide range of popular maxims in ancient literature exemplify a gradual mitigation of this severe principle on practical and theoretical grounds.⁶ One of these mitigating

¹ Jesus' maxim has been called the "Golden Rule" since the late Middle Ages. The title is first attested in English in the 18th century, see Bruce M. Metzger, "The Designation 'The Golden Rule,'" *Expository Times* 69 (1958) 304.

² Hugo Grotius, "Ad Matthaeum," in *Annotationes in libros evangeliorum* (Amsterdam: Blaev, 1641), Johannes Wetstein, *He Kaine Diatheke* (Amsterdam: Dommer, 1751), Gotthold Resch, *Das Aposteldekret nach seiner ausserkanonischen Textgestalt*, Texte und Untersuchungen N F 13 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905).

³ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 509–16.

⁴ This is not an exegetical study but a foundational study in Christian ethics, and so argument from the context in the Gospels is sharply limited only to the presumably more original context in the love of enemies command, as in Luke 6:27–36.

⁵ Albrecht Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel. Eine Einführung in die Geschichte der antiken und frühchristlichen Vulgarethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962). Exegetical study of the Golden Rule has been sparse. In this century, I count three monographs and seven articles, of which the most important are Peder Borgen, "The Golden Rule with Emphasis on its Usage in the Gospels," in his *Paul Preaches Circumcision and Pleases Men, and Other Essays on Christian Origins* (Trondheim: TAPIR, 1983, Swedish original in 1966) 99–114, Reinhold Merkelbach, "Über eine Stelle im Evangelium des Lukas," *Grazer Beiträge* 1 (1970) 171–75, Georg Strecker, "Compliance—Love of One's Enemy—the Golden Rule," *Australian Biblical Review* 29 (1981) 38–46, Hans-Werner Bartsch, "Traditionsgeschichtliches zur 'goldenen Regel' und zum Aposteldekret," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 (1984) 128–32, Paul Ricoeur, "The Golden Rule: Exegetical and Theological Perplexities," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990) 392–97, Josef Fuchs, "Die schwierige Goldene Regel," *Stimmen der Zeit* 209 (1991) 773–81. See the almost complete bibliography in Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* 508. Most recently, Jeffrey Wattles' study of the rule in philosophical and religious ethics, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University, 1996), has the most extensive bibliography, primarily of philosophical works.

⁶ As practical reasons Dihle lists practical necessity, the increasing role of forgiveness in human relationships, and the precariousness of human life which makes it impossible to forecast the exact occurrence of retribution. Retribution was attacked theoretically in the philosophical tradition beginning with Socrates (cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 509c–510c, *Republic* 332b–336a, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1132b), and in the deliberately self-denying ethic of Christianity.

maxims is the Golden Rule. Dihle found the earliest witness to it in Herodotus's use of a sophist maxim and postulated that it passed into Judaism only through Hellenistic influence in the second century. As a form of retribution theory he found it incompatible with Jesus' teaching of self-emptying love. Dihle took the *poieite* of Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31 as an indicative, expressing the current synagogue morality which the disciples were practicing. Jesus corrects them in Luke 6:32–36.

Although subsequent scholars have challenged Dihle's conclusions about the incidence of the Golden Rule in pre-Christian literature and its place in Jesus' teaching, Dihle's conceptual framework still dominates the study of the Golden Rule.⁷ Consequently, a remarkable degree of confusion still dogs almost all aspects of study of the Golden Rule, and any discussion of the Golden Rule must investigate all three principal aspects: the thought content of the rule, its literary form, and the alleged uniqueness of Jesus' version.

THOUGHT CONTENT OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Although Dihle located the Golden Rule in the category of retribution, it really does not belong there.⁸ Retribution addresses the kind and extent of sanction to be levied against the doer of a good or bad action: the *lex talionis* responds to injuries already done to one. The Golden Rule, however, in both its positive and negative form, is not a response to an action, but the consideration of an appropriate *first* action. The fact that one ponders what he or she would want others to do to him or her does not make his or her actions a response to the other's act; there is no other's act.⁹ On this understanding some confusion about the Golden Rule already vanishes.

Dihle himself had made the "principle of equivalence" the middle term linking theory of retribution with the Golden Rule.¹⁰ Although Paul Ricoeur understands the rule as an improvement on retribution insofar as the reciprocity is anticipated and the rule is addressed to intentions, dispositions, and feelings, it remains for him also an expression of the logic of equivalence, opposed to Jesus' ordinary logic of superabundance. He finds the equivalence in an anticipation that the other will respond in kind to my generous action, will "act in such a way that . . ." Thus both Dihle and Ricoeur understand the underlying

⁷ Wattles, *Golden Rule*, rejects Dihle's provenance of the Golden Rule and has made a number of new distinctions in its conception, but his work interprets the Golden Rule too broadly to serve as focus for future discussion.

⁸ The principal authors who discuss the Golden Rule under the form of reciprocity are Olivier Du Roi, *La reciprocité: Essai de morale fondamentale* (Paris, Epi, 1970) 31–49, and Hans Ritter, "Gegenseitigkeit," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1974) 3.119–29.

⁹ Both the positive and negative form of the rule leave others' prior actions totally out of account; the "re-" of retaliation is lacking.

¹⁰ Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel* 81–82.

motive of the Golden Rule to be *do ut des* ("I give in order that you may give").¹¹ Ricoeur's fatal error is mistranslating Jesus' "as you wish that others would do" as "as you *expect* that others would do." The verb (*e*)*thelein* does not mean "expect," neither in classical nor Hellenistic Greek, nor anywhere in the New Testament!¹² Jesus' form does not anticipate a response as the intention of the Golden Rule.¹³ He asks disciples to get in touch with their own desires and act accordingly for the other. Thus the underlying motive could be love of neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18); there is no hint of a *do ut des*.

Werner Wolbert maintains that the context in which the Golden Rule is placed can change its meaning radically.¹⁴ But its context in Luke's Sermon reinforces the argument that no *do ut des* is involved. In Luke 6:27–30 Jesus never even implies a motive for the various mandated acts of nonreciprocal love of neighbor. When he finally does explicitly enunciate a motive in 6:35–36, it is not *do ut des*, but its opposite, a disinterested love as *imitatio Dei*.¹⁵ Therefore the context also demonstrates its nonreciprocal nature, and so, *pace* Dihle and Ricoeur, makes love of enemies and the Golden Rule in 6:27–36 homogeneous in their ethical motivation.¹⁶ If the Golden Rule is not a moral

¹¹ Ricoeur, "Golden Rule" 394–95

¹² Classical Greek for "expect" is *prosdokan*, *prosdchesthai*, *elpizein*, *perimenein*, or *elpesthai*. The last does not occur in the NT, and *perimenein* is found only at Acts 10:24 (meaning "to keep watch for"), but the other three verbs are used for "expect" in the NT. Luke would have used *elpizein* if he meant "expect," for he explicitly does so in 6:34, right in the immediate context of his Golden Rule!

¹³ Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 2 vols (Freiburg: Herder, 1969) 1:351. Only by implication from one's presuppositions can one introduce motivation into Jesus' formulation of the rule. Anthony E. Harvey's sharp critique of a *do ut des* in Jesus' positive formulation of the rule is marred by his acceptance of its implication in the negative formulation; see his review of Dihle in *Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964) 386–88. His implication of retribution applies more clearly to his example from Seneca *Epistula* 94:43, "*ab alio expectes alteri quod feceris*," than it does to the negative form of the rule.

¹⁴ W. Wolbert, "Die goldene Regel und das *ius talionis*," *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 95 (1986) 169–81, esp. 170–71. In this case, the context would introduce the expectation of a *do ut des* which is not in the rule's explicit formulation.

¹⁵ Jesus does promise a great reward in Luke 6:35b, but it is not a reciprocal one; rather the vagueness of the reward, in comparison with Luke 18:28–30 and parallels, suggests that the reward is the deep personal relations of sons and daughters of God.

¹⁶ The *ut* in *do ut des* can introduce two different kinds of clauses. It can introduce a purpose clause "I give in order that you may give." Thus my action is aimed at getting you to conform your action to mine, and so the motive is ultimately self-interest in the good action which you return to me. The *ut* can also be taken as a result clause "I give, and as a result you give to me." My action could now be altruistic: my generous giving to you results in your return in kind, but that was not my (primary) intent. This latter action is more altruistic, but it is not as altruistic as simply loving the other as other as the sole purpose of my action. This would be more like God's altruistic love, which sometimes converts the other and sometimes does not, but is freely given in either case. God's own holiness as a motive for Hebrew conduct in the Holiness Code links altruism to *imitatio Dei* just as does the Golden Rule in Luke 6:27–36.

maxim of mitigated retribution, what then is it? It is a moral maxim of general altruism expressed by mutuality between a doer and others.¹⁷

LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FORM

The Golden Rule is said to exist in two literary forms, the positive ("What you want others to do to you, so do to them") and the negative ("What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others"). Although a few exegetes have asserted the radical superiority of the positive formulation,¹⁸ some prestigious interpreters have asserted that there is no difference between the two forms.¹⁹

I have a series of four Venn diagrams which demonstrate that the two formulations are not formally equivalent in the Aristotelian logic of inclusion. However, formal logicians want to analyze the two propositions in the contemporary logic of exclusion which is extremely intricate and beyond the scope of this article.

Fortunately, however, it is the material analysis of their contents which shows that the positive formulation is radically different from the negative one. The positive form has greater extension and higher quality of actions and desires than does the negative formulation. Consequently, for the remainder of this article, I adopt the scholarly convention of referring to the negative formulation as the Silver Rule.

Extension

The positive formulation governs a greater range of actions than does the negative. This can be seen by analyzing the following two principles: (1) *The principle of non-maleficence*: one ought not to inflict evil or harm.²⁰ This general principle underlies the Silver Rule and is operative in all prohibitions of injuries. Note, however, that it prohibits an action; it neither commands nor recommends any positive action which an ethical agent ought to undertake. (2) *The principle of beneficence*: one ought to do that which benefits. This principle commands all positive, beneficial, actions. It is the general principle underlying the

¹⁷ The subject of the first clause of the rule becomes the indirect object of the second clause, and the indirect object of the first becomes the subject of the second.

¹⁸ Many ancients and recently Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896) 186; Joachim Jeremias, "Goldene Regel," in *Religion in der Geschichte und Gegenwart* 2, cols. 1687–89; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1961) 148–49; Heinrich Kahlefeld, *Der Jünger* (Frankfurt: J. Knecht, 1962) 80–83.

¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 103; Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel*; Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile selon Luc* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1924) 205–6; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 639–40; Christopher F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM, 1990) 335; see also Marcus Singer, "The Golden Rule," *Philosophy* 38 (1963) 293–94; and the longer, if loose, argumentation in Borgen, "Golden Rule" 102–3. Further, many others presume this equivalency, even if they do not explicitly state it.

²⁰ This is a principle that all ethicists accept, because denying it removes one from the realm of any ethical discourse.

Golden Rule, and it governs three different types of actions: (a) one ought to prevent evil or harm, e.g., not only by not doing it oneself (= the principle of non-maleficence) but by interposing oneself between the one harming and any victims of an injurious action; (b) one ought to remove the cause of evil or harm, e.g., by legislation or individual action to combat exploitative business practices or epidemic disease; (c) one ought to do the good positively: on the level of basic duty, by acting justly, and on the level of heroic charity, by forgiving the same offense for the seventh time, or even "laying down one's life" for the other, even the enemy. Now it is clear that the Silver Rule does not cover actions described in (a), (b), or (c). "Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself" does not obligate the Good Samaritan.²¹ The Golden Rule does obligate him, for we all wish that others will put aside prejudices to treat our wounds (b) and to pay for our care in an inn (c). Further, we wish this positive action of succoring us in our great need even when it entails considerable inconvenience or even temporary suffering on the part of the other. Thus it is clear that the Golden Rule places greater demands on one's conduct than does the Silver Rule. The two forms may be logically consistent, but they are not equivalent.

Quality

The actions mandated by Jesus' Golden Rule are not merely more extensive than those mandated by the Silver Rule, but they enter into the limitlessness of human desire that is oriented towards the infinite love of God. Thus humans desire not merely material benefits, maintaining and ameliorating physical existence, but the whole range of actions which build a human community where the love of God is present and active, that is, the whole range of extraordinarily loving actions described in the Sermon on the Plain.²² In short, the Golden Rule opens human moral obligation to the deepest human thirst for God's self-giving love toward his creatures, far beyond the kinds of actions that can be mandated by any natural or positive law, or even by the divinely revealed Mosaic Law. It embodies the most radical altruism.

To summarize, then, the formal and material characteristics of Jesus' formulation of the Golden Rule, it is (1) a general moral maxim,²³

²¹ One could say that the Silver Rule obligates the Good Samaritan not to pass by the beaten and robbed man, for this would be to do to him what he would not want done to himself. But when one asks what the Good Samaritan should do once he stops, then one is into a range of positive actions (binding up his wounds, taking him to an inn) which are not mandated by the Silver Rule, but only by the positive wishes of the Golden Rule.

²² See Friedrich Hauck, *Evangelium des Lukas* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1934) 434; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* 149.

²³ It is not addressed to a specific situation, such as the correct political conduct of a ruler, or how to raise one's children.

an imperative addressed to the wide spectrum of humanity,²⁴ (2) whose close formal mutuality between subjects and indirect objects of the same verbs expresses a common human dignity and worth,²⁵ and (3) whose positive form, beginning from the desires of the human heart, opens to those desires' reach for the infinite; (4) thus its context is neither a reactive (retaliation) nor anticipated (*do ut des*) reciprocity of benefits or injuries, but a general altruism (grounded in God's own altruistic behavior and the Christian vocation of sons and daughters of that God).

ORIGIN OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Among most exegetes it has become commonplace that the Golden Rule as a general moral maxim existed before Jesus, not only in the negative form, but also in the positive formulation.²⁶ Now that we have defined its form more precisely, a careful survey of the texts usually cited as predecessors of Jesus' usage does not support this contention. What emerges rather is the originality of his positive formulation.

*Eastern Texts*²⁷

Confucius (sixth century B.C.) proclaimed *shu* as the moral rule for all human life and exemplified it by the Silver Rule, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."²⁸ Although *shu* can mean "reciprocity," Confucius explains it not in the sense of a response to another's action, but in the sense of "fellow feeling" or "mutual consideration," coming from the initiative of the ethical person.²⁹ Confucius has, in its negative formulation, a moral maxim of altruism, but it is

²⁴ Even the Silver Rule, if addressed to Tobias, does not address the conduct of only this individual, but is also something that all Jews are to practice. The Golden Rule is addressed to the disciples in both Matthew and Luke, but in both the crowds also hear the message (Matthew 7:28; Luke 7:1); indeed, in Luke 6:17–18 the crowds are explicitly the audience of the Sermon.

²⁵ For the Greco-Roman variants of the Golden Rule, especially among the Stoics, Borgen finds an underlying motive of the natural equality of humans and their consequent balanced reciprocity of relations ("Golden Rule" 104). Ricoeur argues the same philosophically in *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 222–27.

²⁶ That his positive formulation is a new creation of Jesus is probably a historically false thesis; see Wolpert, "Die goldene Regel" 175, who, like others, bases this position on the research of Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel* 10, 112–13.

²⁷ Each of these formulations exists in its own context, which I have attended to but cannot analyze at appropriate length in this short article.

²⁸ Analect 15.23, cited in Robert O. Ballou, *The Bible of the World* (New York: Viking, 1939) 413, a partial reprint of C. A. Wong's *The Analects of Confucius, the Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius*.

²⁹ See "To be the first to behave towards friends as I would expect them to behave towards me," in Ku Hung Ming, *The Conduct of Life: A Translation of the Doctrine of the Mean* (London: J. Murray, 1906) 13.26.

not general, for he does not, as does Jesus, apply this *shu* to enemies, but only to friends.³⁰

The Taoist tradition with which Confucius was in dialogue did not come to written expression in the *Tao Te Ching* until the fourth century B.C. There the principle of *wu-wei*³¹ has been translated as "To those who are good to me I am good; and to those who are not good to me I am also good—and thus all get to be good."³² This may be a form of *do ut des*, but "all get to be good" may go beyond reciprocity, to an altruistic desire for the conversion of those who have treated me wrongly. However, more modern versions have translated the passage as "Those who are good I treat as good. Those who are not good I also treat as good. In so doing I gain in goodness."³³ This Taoist thought has love of enemies but it is not altruistic, nor does it have the form of a maxim. Thus Confucius has the form of the Silver Rule, but lacks its universality; the Taoists have neither the altruism nor the general-moral-maxim form of the Golden Rule.

Greco-Roman Texts

Greco-Roman texts have been the ones most frequently adduced as antecedents of Jesus' usage,³⁴ but they are no nearer to Jesus' Golden Rule than are the Eastern texts. I will treat them here in the order in which they most closely approximate Jesus' form.

(1) Some of these texts are examples of retribution, or strict reciprocity, not of altruism, as Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 6.1.47: "To pay a debt of gratitude, try to be to him what he has been to you." This is an example of perfect specific reciprocity, responding to the prior act of another. Seneca *Epistula* 94.43, "Expect from another what you have done to another," reverses the order of the specific reciprocity, so that one should expect of the other what one has already done.³⁵

(2) Some of these texts lack the form of mutuality, as Isocrates *To*

³⁰ Confucius did not accept the Taoist rule of returning good for evil. When someone asked him, "What do you think of repaying evil with kindness," he answered, "Then what are you going to repay kindness with? . . . Repay kindness with kindness, but repay evil with justice" (Analect 7.17, in Lin Yutang, ed., *The Wisdom of China and India* [New York: Random House, 1942] 817).

³¹ The *Tao* means "the way to go," based on the harmonious way of the universe; *wu-wei* means "non-meddling action" which does not interfere with *Tao*.

³² *Sacred Books of the East* 39: *The Texts of Taoism*, trans. James Legge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1891) 91.

³³ Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 110; see also the version of Daisetz T. Suzuki and Paul Carus, *Lao Tze, The Canon of Reason and Virtue* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974) 173. Close attention to the literary context of the passage confirms the correctness of the latter two translations.

³⁴ Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel*, gives an exhaustive list of the passages cited by his predecessors. John Nolland has winnowed these occurrences down to the 19 closest parallels in the Greco-Roman world (*Luke 1-9:20* [Dallas: Word, 1989] 298).

³⁵ Exegetes often list Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae* 2 as another antecedent, not noting that it is verbatim the maxim which Seneca consciously quotes in *Epistula* 94.

Nicoclem 38, "Whatever advice you would give your children, follow it yourself." This speaks of consistency in action, but not of mutuality between the actions of parents and children.³⁶ The same is true of the frequently cited *To Nicoclem* 49, "You should be such in your dealings with others as you expect me to be in my dealings with you." Here the mutuality is not between the officials and their subjects, but a three-way relationship between king, officials, and those subject to them.³⁷ Even Seneca's highest precept, *Epistula* 47.11, "So live with an inferior as you would want a superior to live with you," has a three-fold relationship between the self, one's inferiors, and one's superiors. This is not a cavil. The altruistic form of mutuality would stress treating my inferiors as my equals. Seneca's lack of mutuality hides the fact that I can treat my inferiors with condescending kindness, which may be as much as I can expect from my superiors. Thus, lack of mutuality reveals that none of these examples really deals with the desires of the subject or the indirect object as the desires of brothers or sisters.

(3) Some of them lack the form of a maxim, as Ovid *Ex Ponto* 3.1.71, "What I would myself supply were I stronger than you, that grant to me, since you are yourself the stronger." This expresses a kind of altruistic mutuality, but not in the form of a maxim. As such, it expresses admirable conduct, but has not reached a generalizable and obligatory human root of its motivation.³⁸ Further, this quotation expresses a reciprocity measured by the projected conduct of the requester, a kind of *da quod darem*, "give what I would give."

(4) Some of them lack the form of generalization. Dihle's earliest examples of the Golden Rule (Herodotus 3.142; 7.136) are actually practical principles of a ruler's political policy, not maxims of general moral application.³⁹ Further, they are examples of the Silver Rule, and so fall short of Jesus' Golden Rule in respect of the principle of benevolence.

³⁶ Likewise Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1384b4, "Do not resent something done to yourself, for what a man does himself, he is said not to resent when his neighbors do it." This may change my conduct, but its motive is still reciprocity or consistency, not altruism.

³⁷ This lack of mutuality occurs in five other frequently cited examples from Isocrates, *Nicocles* 24, and 62.; *Ad Demonicum* 14; *Panegyricus* 81 (which does not even have the imperatival form of maxim). *Aegenet.* 51, "Prove yourselves to be for me such judges as you would want to have for yourselves," comes closest to the required formal mutuality, but the mutuality of the Golden Rule would have it, "Prove yourselves to be for me such judges as you would have me be for you." In *Dio Cassius* 53.34, Maecenas advises Caesar, "Whatever you wish your subjects to think and do, this you should always say and do yourself." This looks close to the Golden Rule, but the mutuality is missing; rather Caesar is exhorted to be a model for his subjects, so as to educate them. Wattle's does an excellent job of revealing in the literary context of Isocrates's advice the ambiguity of his motivations, all less than the altruism of Jesus' Golden Rule (*Golden Rule* 31).

³⁸ The same is true of the admirable ideas on true friendship in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b and 1158b, as well as the quotation from Aristotle in *Diog. Laert.* 5.21.

³⁹ See Harvey's review of Dihle (n. 13 above), which says that at most these describe "a moral convention applying to rulers." Indeed Maenandrius's "I will not myself do that which I account blameworthy in my neighbor" (3.142) soon succumbs to practical expediency when he has to imprison those who oppose his milder rule.

(5) That leaves one Greek text as a general moral maxim of altruism, but expressed negatively, "Do not do to others what angers you when they do it to you" (Isocrates, *Ad Nicoclem* 61), and one Latin text which expresses the Golden Rule positively, "Let us so give as we would wish to receive" (Seneca, *De beneficiis* 2.1.1). But "let us give" limits the mutuality of action to giving, rather than to ruling, forgiving, etc.⁴⁰

Thus we can see one example of the Golden Rule in Greco-Roman literature contemporaneous with Jesus, but none of the examples adduced express in a general moral maxim the perfect mutuality and altruism of Jesus' Golden Rule.

Jewish Literature

Leviticus 19:18 lays down the law of altruistic love of one's covenant partner in Israel, but Dihle is correct that the formal rule does not appear in Israel until Hellenistic times. Then we have four approximations of the Silver Rule.

In the third century B.C., *The Letter of Aristeas* 207 gives the Jewish response to Ptolemy II's question about wisdom: "Insofar as you do not wish evils to come upon you, but to partake of every blessing, (it would be wisdom) if you put this into practice with your subjects, including the wrongdoers . . ." This form⁴¹ does not have the identity of verbs, but, like Jesus' own form, it begins with the desires of the subject and it applies benevolence even to wrongdoers. From the same period comes the perfect form of the Silver Rule in Tobit 4:15, "And what you hate, do not do to anyone." Here is a general altruistic moral maxim; the mutuality of the members is implicit, but real.⁴² Contemporaneous with Jesus and the formation of the synoptic tradition is Philo's *Hypothetica* (preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 8.7.6), "Moreover it is ordained in the laws themselves that no one shall do to his neighbor what he would be unwilling to have done to himself," an expression of the Silver Rule. Perhaps also contemporaneous with Jesus is Hillel's classic formulation of the negative form, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else; that is the whole Law, all else is commentary. Go and learn."⁴³ Thus quite clear forms of the Silver Rule

⁴⁰ Further, the altruism of this maxim seems clouded in its original context by the essay's subtle concern for reciprocity, as well as its making the perfection of the giver the motive for generosity, always a factor in Hellenistic (and especially Stoic) ethics.

⁴¹ The advice begins with a negative form, but includes positive elements and so approaches Jesus' maxim, even if the imperative is only implied. Sirach 31:15 implies that the correspondence between one's own feelings and dislikes and that of the other should form the norm of conduct, but does not state it in the form of a rule.

⁴² This might well be the source of Hillel's negative form of the rule, and, given the emphasis of Tobit 4:7, 16 on unlimited almsgiving, perhaps also the Sermon in Luke (although Tobit 4:17 denies bread to sinners!).

⁴³ Hillel, like Philo, derives the notion from the Law. A special case is 2 Enoch 61:1: "And just as a person makes request for his own soul from God, in the same manner let him behave toward every living soul." Although this formula lacks mutuality and iden-

were enunciated in the Jewish tradition prior to and contemporaneous with Jesus, but there are no clear examples of the Golden Rule.

Jesus' positive formulation of the general moral maxim of altruistic mutuality is then unique in ancient literature. In fact, it is so unique that even the Christian tradition seems not to have been able to maintain it in its purity and almost always cites the Silver Rule.⁴⁴

SUMMARY

1. The Golden Rule is not a maxim of retribution or even of reciprocity; rather it is a moral maxim of general altruism, expressed by mutuality between a doer and others.

2. Logical analysis reveals the greater extension and benevolence evoked by the positive formulation of the Golden Rule in contrast with the negative formulation of the Silver Rule.

3. When (1) and (2) are attended to, it becomes clear that Jesus' formulation of the Golden Rule has no precedents in the thought world of his time. It is unique.

4. This uniqueness finds its ground in the literary context in which Jesus' rule is located in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:27-36): the command to love one's enemies (6:27-30), the rejection of the Greek ethic of reciprocity (6:32-34), and the disciples' *imitatio Dei* (6:35c-36). (In this article I assume that this uniqueness finds its theological root in Jesus' filial relation to his Father, which he mediates to his disciples, and, through them, to the whole world that is created athirst for God's infinite originating and consummating love.)

Our inquiry has had a limited but important task, namely to eliminate misconceptions so that the uniqueness and power of Jesus' Golden Rule might come into view. The essential task that remains is a deeper investigation of the breath-taking open-endedness of Jesus' radical altruism that so confounds the rational procedures of ethicists. Exegetes and theologians must inquire into the conditions which vindicate its radicalness of open-ended human desires: the love of enemies, and the call to a more perfect imitation of God's open-ended benevolence. This requires a theological exegesis of the Gospel and the Sermon in which the Golden Rule is located, an inquiry into the radical nature of Jesus' transformation of the human condition in the Reign of God which he has ushered in.

typical of actions, it begins with the desires of the human heart and requests corresponding conduct toward the other. The work, however, is undatable and so full of Christian scribal glosses that it is difficult to know if it is a predecessor of Jesus' own formulation.

⁴⁴ Even the D interpolations of the Golden Rule in Acts 15:20, 28-29 use the negative form. For a survey of the infrequency of the Golden Rule in early Christian writings, see H.-W. Bartsch, "Traditionsgeschichtliches" 128-32. Of the 24 instances of the rule before Augustine which Dihle cites (*Die Goldene Regel* 107), only six occur in the positive form, and only Justin, *Dialogue* 93.1 is from the first two centuries. By the criterion of dissimilarity, then, one might well investigate whether the positive formulation of the Golden Rule is an *ipsissima vox Iesu*.