

"Recasting the Golden Rule: Claude Sumner's Philosophical Contribution Reconsidered."

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Abstract

The analysis of the treatise of Zär'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät is one example of Claude Sumner's contribution to Ethiopian philosophy that deserves more recognition than the little attention it has attracted in contemporary scholarly engagements. Of particular significance is his analysis of the treatise's social philosophy as condensed in the universal ethical dictum: the Golden Rule, which is a "precept that one should do as one would be done by." The purpose of this article is to inquire what this particular analysis could contribute to the broader discourse of the Golden Rule to resolve interpretational difficulties, and to the social dimension of human life, focusing on the value of respect that binds people together. To this end, the article begins by clarifying how this moral precept is set in a religious perspective to establish it as a supreme moral principle. Subsequently, the discussion will focus on how such a moral rule fosters the conceptual passage from the teleological (ethical aim) to the deontological (moral norm) and from respect to just relations, serving as a ligament that links both subjective and objective norms. Here, I will argue that this supreme moral principle has a comparative advantage over the Kantian Categorical Imperative. Finally, the paper will conclude by accentuating the moral-philosophical implications of the discussion pertinent to diversity and social cohesion.

Keywords: Claude Sumner, Golden Rule, Respect, Wäldä Həywät, Zär 'a Ya'eqob

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Some Premises

Although philosophy – as a knowledge enterprise– is not new in Ethiopia, its modern systematic organisation is significantly connected to the development of modern higher education. In connection to such development, it is impossible to overlook the contribution of Claude Sumner, a philosopher who served in the philosophy department of Addis Ababa University for many years. The analysis of the *Ḥatäta* (Treatise) of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät is one example of Sumner's contribution to Ethiopian philosophy that deserves more recognition and development, than the relatively little attention it has attracted in contemporary scholarly engagements.

Of particular significance is Sumner's analysis of the *Ḥatäta*'s social philosophy as condensed in the universal ethical dictum known as the Golden Rule: “do [...] what you wish others to do to you; do not do to them that which you do not want to be done to you” (Sumner, 1978, p. 225). This notion is often considered as an “ethic of reciprocity,” and the word “golden” is taken to mean “inestimable utility” (Green, 2008, p. 1&3). Assumed in the Golden Rule is the reciprocity between the agent (who acts) and the recipient/patient (who is acted upon). That is, one gives in order to receive; one treats the other(s) just in the same way he or she wishes to be treated. Consequently, the agent always expects something in return from the recipient. Such reciprocity implies the logic of equivalence, which makes both agent and recipient equal or equally capable of agency.

The actual text Sumner uses combines the love commandment and the Golden Rule: “Love your fellow men as yourself, and do to them what you wish others to do to you; do not do to them that which you do not want to be done to you” (Sumner, 1978, p. 225). Such a combination raises the question as to whether the imperatives combined have the same underlying logic. I would argue that the love commandment, which Sumner presents with the Golden Rule of the *Ḥatäta*, does not strictly imply reciprocity. That is, you give expecting nothing in return. So, the underlying logic is not that of reciprocity and of equivalence, but a logic that can be called superabundance, which abounds in the New Testament (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 392). Hence, the love commandment and the Golden Rule, which are brought together, but with a difference in their underlying logic, raise the question that the former might deny or overcome the latter. In other words, the love commandment of loving one's neighbour or enemy makes the Golden Rule obsolete since love supersedes all other commandments of the Decalogue.

As some scholars have argued recently, there is a paradox when the Golden Rule is placed in relation to the scriptural imperative of loving one's fellow or neighbour (Ricoeur, 1990, pp. 392-397; 1995, pp. 293-302). The paradox is that the

Golden Rule is usually associated with the logic of equivalence, that is, the agent and recipient/patient are considered to have (potentially) a capacity for reciprocity whereas with neighbour-love one operates with the logic of superabundance that flows from an economy of gift. Thus, relating or conjoining these two – the Golden Rule and neighbour-love – demands the reconciliation of what seems to be an apparent contradiction or paradox.

Second, interestingly enough, both the negative and the positive formulations of the Golden Rule are present in Wäldä Həywät's social philosophy, the differentiation (and implication) of which are unnoticed by Sumner himself. "[...] do to them what you wish others to do to you" illustrates the positive while "do not do to them that which you do not want to be done to you" shows the negative. These two formulations dovetail with two traditions: the positive formulation – based on the scriptural allusion – echoing Jesus' saying in Luke 6:31 while the negative formulation finds its parallel in Hillel ("Do not do unto your neighbor what you would hate him to do to you").¹ Both the positive and negative formulations have their own merits and can complement each other, as we will discuss later (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 219). Therefore, we can approach Sumner's contribution with two layers of questions (1) related to the interpretational dilemma on the interpretation of the Golden Rule within a religious perspective, and the implications of Golden Rule reasoning and (2) its social contribution in light of its positive and negative formulations within a moral philosophical framework.

In this article, I inquire as to what this particular analysis could contribute to the broader discourse of the Golden Rule to resolve interpretational perplexities, and to the social dimension of human life, focusing on the value of respect that binds people together. To this end, the article begins by clarifying how this moral precept is set in a religious perspective to establish it as a supreme moral principle. Subsequently, the discussion will focus on how such a moral rule fosters the conceptual passage from the teleological (ethical aim) to the deontological (moral norm) and from respect to just relations, serving as a ligament that links both subjective and objective norms. I will particularly seek to demonstrate that this supreme moral principle has a comparative advantage over the Kantian Categorical Imperative: "Act solely in accordance with the maxim by which you can wish at

¹ For references on the positive and negative formulations of the rule drawing on ancient Christian materials and mainly patristic sources, see David W. T. Brattston, *Traditional Christian Ethics, Vol.2: Affirmative or Positive Commandments* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2014), pp. 404-405.

the same time that what ought not to be, namely evil, will indeed not exist”². Finally, the paper will conclude by accentuating the moral-philosophical implications of the discussion pertinent to diversity and social cohesion.

The Golden Rule: Interpretational Perplexities

Two kinds of arguments are most often advanced to propose that the Golden Rule is not denied or overcome by the love commandment (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 393; 1995, pp.293-302). The first argument is based on exegetical grounds. The second argument is based on the conceptual affinity between the Golden Rule and the rule of retaliation (*jus talionis*), both of which require equivalence. Although the Golden Rule is an improvement of the rule of retaliation – addressing “intentions, dispositions, and feelings,” it does not escape from the circle of equivalence (Ricoeur, 1990, p.394). Consequently, there is an argument that the love commandment shatters the expectation of a return or reciprocity presupposed by equivalence.

It can, however, be argued that the Golden Rule is not denied but reinterpreted within a religious perspective. The potential intent of it may reveal an improvement of the rule of retaliation. According to Sumner, the *Ḥatāta* forbids retaliation: “Do not say the same as they do; for all men are our fellow men whether they are good, or evil [...] We ought to avoid their evil as much as possible and not to answer evil by evil; because vindication belongs only to God the judge of all” (Sumner, 1978, p. 225). Even though the Golden Rule is not about retaliation, it has the logic of equivalence or reciprocity in common with the rule of retaliation. Possibly, the perversion of the Golden Rule would lead to retaliation. It would be essential to draw attention to the formula of the Golden Rule, which is “I give *in order that* I receive” (give and take). There is an expectation of a return. It is such an expectation that keeps the Golden Rule entangled within the framework of the rule of retaliation at the centre of which is “self-interest” (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 395).

What happens when the Golden Rule is reinterpreted from a religious perspective is that it is rescued from its possible perversion. Without the logic of superabundance, the Golden Rule tends to be interpreted as a rule of retaliation. Such a rescue also safeguards the interpretation of the Golden Rule in divergent ways. A good example, here, could be the historical debate between the pro-slavery

² Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*, 228. Here, Paul Ricoeur is not stating that evil will be completely eradicated; instead, he is just accentuating the Categorical Imperative embeds a “wish” (manifest in the Kantian “good will”) to prevent evil (or better, evil in the sense of moral injury or crime).

proponents and the Abolitionists who used the Golden Rule in their rhetoric, albeit in divergent ways. For Abolitionists, the Golden Rule sanctioned the elimination of slavery. By contrast, for pro-slavery ministers, the abolition of slavery might cause the disruption of the social order and the economic system, in which case free men who place themselves in the position of slaves would not opt for freedom, for the Golden Rule demands them to refrain from disrupting the socio-economic order (Green, 2008, p. 4). This example illustrates that such a positive ethic of reciprocity might work negatively. It is then no wonder if notable thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud regard the Golden Rule as vague, trivial, absurd, and almost banal (Freud, 1930, p. 14; Green, 2008; Kant, 2002; Marks, 2005; Nietzsche, 2005, pp. 86-88; Wattles, 1996, pp. 81-86).

Even contemporary moral-philosophical discussions are replete, which highlight the interpretational problem associated with the rule. One example could be Stephen Darwall's assessment of the rule (Darwall, 2006, pp. 115-118). Darwall takes his cue from Hobbes's version of the Golden Rule. He understands the rule as a formula of reciprocity – "Do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself" – we are confronted with various ways of understanding the formula. Then, he proceeds to inquire as to what is implied in the "thou wouldst not have done to thyself." Should it be understood in terms of preference/choice or desire that X prefers the state in which Y does Z (for X), implying that X would have Y not (or "would not have him") forbear to do Z for X? Or, could that mean that the Golden Rule enjoins X not to forebear Y do Z (for X – who is equally in a position to do Z for Y)? Again, if the formula is understood in terms of acceptance, it could lead to the same interpretational problems. What then is the way out of such interpretational quandaries? For Darwall, the Golden Rule must be interpreted in terms of what he calls "second-personal accountability" – which requires placing oneself in the place of another person. This reversal of roles, thinking and acting "with and for others" may be called "solicitude" (Ricoeur, 1992, p.172).

Solicitude or second-personal accountability illustrates a reversal of positions between the agent and the recipient. Implied in this is the possibility of the agent placing himself or herself in the place of the recipient. According to this schema, you give to the other not *in order that* you may be given, but *because* you love the other (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 395). Now, note the shift from "in order that" to "because". While with the rule of reciprocity you expect a return – you give so that you will be given, the logic of superabundance operates around a "because":

"because it has been given to you, go and do alike".³ The superabundant logic of neighbour-love and its economy of gift inspire a new impulse of generosity in the Golden Rule. As long as the Golden Rule is understood to mean reciprocity – treating others well to be treated well – it cannot liberate itself from its confinement in the rule of retaliation. Its liberation demands a shift from “in order that” to “because” in which instance the rule assumes a different meaning.

Let us now briefly examine the conceptual argument – reinterpreting the principle of morality in light of religious doctrines and symbols. For example, creationism is at the centre of the *Hatäta*, and the "because" that informs and reinterprets the Golden Rule becomes intelligible in this light. We are admonished to love one another, to respect the other, to consider others as equal because we are all created beings under one creator. We must respect the law, not because it is issued authoritatively by an authority (as in positive law); instead, we must respect the law because of its transcendental source (God the creator) and the inherent God-given value of humanity (natural law). This is what Sumner’s account of the Golden Rule assumes.

Conceptually, the Golden Rule is enriched, but not eliminated, by its proximity to the love commandment. The link makes possible the reinterpretation of the Golden Rule in terms of the economy of gift. Bringing together neighbour-love and the Golden Rule seems to introduce a tension as the former is unilateral while the latter is bilateral. However, the tension is a positive one as the subordination of the latter to the former essentially preserves the second from perversion. In the next discussion, I will briefly address this tension between unilateral love and bilateral justice implied in the Golden Rule.

Golden Rule Reasoning: From Solicitude – via Norms – to the Just, and Back Again

In his analysis of the *Hatäta*, Sumner brings into focus the Golden Rule within the broader framework of Wäldä Həywät’s social ethics/philosophy. Within such a more general context, the individual self is socially situated in relation to others and that the self is capable of agency (that is, the capacity to act and to be acted upon). Deploying the “ABA’ dialectical triad,” this section aims at a theoretical

³ Ricoeur, “The Golden Rule,” 396. The reference to neighbour-love is made not to add a justificatory reason. Instead, it is to show how it can offer a reason for act (explanatory adequacy) in the state of affairs that precedes moral acts. In this respect, both Ricoeur and Darwall agree.

articulation of the ethical ensemble of the *Ḥatāta* as expounded by Sumner (1978, pp. 226-227).

For Sumner, the ABA' dialectics of the *Ḥatāta* is distinct from the Hegelian dialectics (that takes the form of ABC). Instead, it starts with a positive direct discourse (similar to a thesis) and proceeds to a negative statement (anti-thesis or antidote or challenge to the thesis) and ends up with a statement that affirms the thesis in light of the anti-thesis (fostering a backward recourse to the first formulation). Sumner deploys this dialectical triad to analyze the thirteenth chapter of the second *Ḥatāta* to expound the social keywords, but here I seek its broader application in the analysis of the ethical ensemble of the *Ḥatāta* in relation to the Golden Rule. In what follows, I will argue that the Golden Rule facilitates the conceptual passage from solicitude – via moral norms– to the just, and back again.

The Ethical Aim and Solicitude

As revealed in my discussion above, the interpretational problem associated with the Golden Rule revolves around the assumed symmetrical reciprocity and equivalence between the agent and the recipient. Inspired by the logic of superabundance in neighbour-love, the agent places herself in the place of the recipient in which the agent discovers a capability for solicitude to care for and love the other. This implies that because of the love commandment the principle of reciprocity in the Golden Rule has been transformed in so far as it allows the reversal of roles between the agent and the recipient. In this light, the *lex talionis* (the rule of retaliation) is agent-oriented while the approach outlined in the foregoing is second-personal or recipient-oriented. It is for the preservation of the Golden Rule from its perversion due to agent-oriented approach that the transformation fostered by the logic of superabundance or the economy of the gift became necessary.

In his distinct idiom, what Sumner examines in the two *Ḥatātas* is precisely this solicitude and second-personal standpoint with the reversibility of roles between the agent and the recipient. The notion of solicitude is a major component of the ethical aim: “Love conditions, nay determines, man’s relations to his fellow man” (Sumner, 1978, p. 232). In the *Ḥatātas*, it is contended that ascetic practices such as solitary prayer and meditation are not intended to alienate the individual from social responsibilities: “If a man remains close to his creator in prayer, he will also remain close to his fellow man, because God ordered man to unite and cooperate with their neighbours” (Sumner, 1978, p. 227). Zār’a Ya’əqob rebukes “those who seek for their salvation in a solitary life, because God wills

that man help one another” (Sumner, 1978, p. 230). Thus, genuine religious experience is not about solitude, but solicitude.

Unlike self-esteem, which reveals an obsession with oneself (i.e., self-absorbedness), solicitude fosters thinking and acting with and for others. Such a dialogic facet promotes a logic of togetherness and the mediation of others – as expressed in friendship (illustrated by the friendship of Zār'a Ya'əqob and his disciple Mətku) – which seeks to nurture the actualization of the other. Of course, the other is not necessarily someone near and dear to us, but could encompass anyone outside of our ethnic and religious affinity or groups(s): “Christians, Mohammedans, Jews, pagans” (Sumner, 1978, p. 225). This implies that there is the unchosen aleatoric character of the neighbour. In essence, the self becomes permanently disposed towards the other, because of solicitude. Thus, while the “self” of self-esteem demonstrates to us the primacy of the self over the other, solicitude reverses the order by giving precedence to the other (*à la* Emmanuel Lévinas).⁴

Both receiving and responsibility are placed on an equal level, thereby, maintaining the balance or symmetry between the self and the other. Hence, solicitude fosters an understanding of the self as another reflective of similitude that equates the self and the other. Here, it is important to note that the malfunctions and interpretational quandaries associated with the Golden Rule, which are briefly mentioned in the preceding section, can be avoided if one understands solicitude in terms of establishing the primacy of the other over that of the self. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the self is forgotten. Sumner draws attention not only to the imperative that “God did not create man that he is busy only with himself, but he created him with the need for the society [other] men” (Sumner, 1978, p.152) but also notes “The care of one’s health [one’s self] is the object of a particular solicitude in the two *Hatatas*” (Sumner, 1978, p.210).

As demonstrated above, the Golden Rule fosters solicitude, which establishes the order of the relationship between the self and the other. However, to speak of the obligatory nature of this relationship, one needs a justification: what makes solicitude or second-person standpoint necessary and desirable? This leads us to a discussion of moral obligation and the need to move from solicitude (at the ethical plane) to the concept of respect (at the moral plane). It is here that I will examine the conceptual affinity between the Golden Rule and the Kantian

⁴ While in the general scheme of the ethical ensemble both self-esteem and solicitude are equally important, it is essential to accentuate the need for asserting the primacy of the latter as it fosters the second-personal standpoint.

Categorical Imperative whereby the former is the ligament between the ethical aim of the good life briefly exemplified in solicitude and the moral plane.

The Moral Plane: The Golden Rule Meets the Kantian Categorical Imperative

Let us now focus on the role of the Golden Rule as a link between ethics and morality. By ethics, I mean that which brings up the “aim of an accomplished life,” while morality refers to the “articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170). Sumner makes a distinction between teleological and deontological ethics, paralleling my distinction between ethics and morality. The interest, here, is not in simply juxtaposing ethics with morality. Rather, the objective is to link ethics (“that which *is considered to be good*”) with morality (“that which *imposes itself as obligatory*”) (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170). Here, one may also use other typologies to show the heuristic distinction between ethics and morality. For example, Ronald Dworkin’s (2011) distinction between “well-being” and “living well” could serve the purpose of demonstrating the distinction and fusion of the good life (ethics) and moral responsibility towards others (morality). The question I will focus on here is: how does the Golden Rule serve as a ligament to conjoin ethics with morality?

Going back to Sumner, we notice that the *Ḥatātas* contain teleological ethics – ethics grounded in the idea of the end (*telos*), and a deontological (rule-based) morality focusing on moral norms or duties. Let us briefly identify the two approaches in Sumner’s analysis prior to addressing the question of connecting the two using the Golden Rule. First, the teleological trajectory tracked by Sumner distinguishes between two kinds of ends (finality): God (the absolute or self-sufficient end) and humanity (the relative or ulterior end) (Sumner, 1978, p.154). “The answer to teleology,” according to Sumner, is the Aristotelian understanding of eudaemonia – happiness as distinct from the truncated or reductive understanding of happiness as pleasure: “you will enjoy perfect bliss, and perpetual and infinite beatitude” (Sumner, 1978, p. 154). The following quote summarizes the whole imperative of eudaemonia:

“Granted that the creator is the only being capable of fulfilling man’s craving for happiness, neither Zār’a Ya’əqob nor Wäldä Həywät escape into a transcendentalism divorced from the reality of this world. On the contrary they are intent on showing

how the transcendental gives an immanent value to all the joys of this life” (Sumner, 1978, p. 155).

What we note here is the ethical plane, which is informed by the transcendental realm, is oriented towards the good, and that the end (*telos*) of humanity is inseparable from the aim of the good life (*Śēnuūy*) toward oneself and the other (Sumner, 1978, p. 157). Implicit in this teleology is a universalism, which is a characteristic feature of deontological approaches. Morality always requires the articulation of moral precepts that can be formalized or codified to serve as universal rules.⁵ (Sumner’s two layers of teleological and deontology dovetail Dworkin’s heuristic distinction between well-being and living well.)

Secondly, let us look at the deontological perspective. Sumner refers to both objective or ultimate norms as well as the subjective norms. These norms inform the law. By law, Sumner refers to positive law as well as the divine law (*nomos*) (Sumner, 1978, p. 159). The law also refers to order (*Śēr’ at*) (Sumner, 1978, p. 160). The following quote represents the deontological orientation of the *Hatätas*:

“Therefore man should adore the one who placed him and exalted him over all his works, and should serve him with all his heart and fulfill the will that he showed him through the light of his reason, by which the good and the evil become apparent. For as we know the creator through the light of our reason, so by the same reason do we know his will [which is] above us” (Sumner, 1978, p. 162).

Regarding the moral plane, Sumner discusses the notion of the “good will” and the will to will (referring to the first order will that conditions human will). As the above two quotes from Sumner demonstrate, the two approaches – the

⁵ Here, the subjective norm evoked by terms such as *ləbb* (heart), *ləbbuna* (conscience), and *həllina* (thoughts): “Zār’a Ya’əqob raises conscience to the sole guide and arbiter of human action. The dictates of conscience are consistent both with the Law of Nature and Divine Revelation. Conscience, Zār’a Ya’əqob seems to argue, is a spark of the Divine Truth, and cannot err. The Ten Commandments and the Six Evangelical Counsels are nothing but formalizations and legal formulations of what our conscience dictates,” Bahru Zewde, “Consolidator, Zār’a Ya’əqob Ethiopian Philosopher,” *The Ethiopian Herald*, January 10, 1963, p. 2 cited in Sumner, *Ethiopian Philosophy III*, 163, note 64.

teleological and deontological approaches – parallel the Aristotelian and Kantian philosophies. Admittedly, drawing the two competing traditions – Aristotelian eudaemonistic ethics defined by teleology and Kantian morality characterized by deontology – is challenging. This implies that there is a barrier. But, how do we, then, pass the conceptual barrier to this task?

The task is made possible by identifying connecting loci in both traditions: “anticipations of universalism implicit in the teleological perspective” and the concept of the “good will” in the deontological perspective.⁶ Within these connecting loci, a relationship of complementarity is created: morality complements ethics. As a result of this connection, a hierarchic relationship also evolves. Ethics must have primacy over morality; put differently, deontology is subordinated to teleology.

Recalling our discussion on solicitude, we can note how this discussion on the link between the teleological and the deontological take solicitude to another level – the moral plane. This can also be done by correlating it to the notion of respect expressed in the *Hatäta*, which can also be related to Kant’s second category, which conceives persons as ends in themselves. As noted above, the concept of the good will in the *Hatäta* (as in Kant) facilitates the passage from ethical aim to the moral plane. In addition, in Kant, “a good will without qualifications is, in the first instance, a will that is constitutionally subject to limitations,” and this implies that the aim of the “good life” must be subjected to the “test of moral obligation,” which might be described by Kant’s Categorical Imperative (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 206).

In this respect, I wish to highlight Sumner’s discussion of diverse kinds of evil acts. For Sumner, the expression of moral evil or moral injury (crime) is defined in terms of its effect on the relation between the individual will and the will or the law of the creator (not as the discrepancy between individual will and the universal will) (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 197). Through such analysis, we are provided with the material and concrete conditions for equality. Of course, at this stage, we can talk of equality grounded in Sumner’s account of creationism. Before God, every individual person has equal standing. Here, Kant’s Categorical Imperative could be echoed with the experience of evil and the possible occurrence of dissymmetry between agent and patient/recipient, or between those who treat and those who are treated. Such dissymmetry can lead to domination, which in turn,

⁶ For Aristotle, the self should relate to the other as another self. Put differently, the other should be received as another self who deserves my respect; see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 204-5.

destroys the self-esteem of the other, consequently creating the condition for violence. It is because of such results that there is a need for the negative prohibition in Kant's second category (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 219-225).

How does the Golden Rule relate to this? The Golden Rule could be considered as one replying to violence, and in fact, it is because of evil that the rule takes a negative form – the fact that there is violence implies that we need morals (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 295). The *Hatäta*'s counsel to mistrust (be suspicious of) one's friend is a recognition of the limits of love and the fragility of the good, and thereby the need to complement the positive formulation of the Golden Rule with the negative one (ethics with morality) (Sumner, 1978, pp. 238-240). It is possible to formalize the Golden Rule in the Kantian second category to avert the influence and domination of one will over another. Nonetheless, unlike Kant's category, the Golden Rule may not necessarily introduce a cleft between "the a priori and the empirical," the Golden Rule demonstrating its advantage over the Kantian Categorical Imperative.⁷ Such an advantage can be demonstrated by taking into consideration the empirical (for example, violence) in the following pairs: agent-patient, action-interaction, and acting-suffering.

Based on the above discussion, we can propose an understanding of the Golden Rule as broadly related to the religious ideal and practice of neighbour-love in order to accentuate the "enunciation of a *norm of reciprocity*," thereby correcting the dissymmetry between the agent and the patient, the prohibition of murder, and its counterpart in the inter-subjective dimension (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 220-222). All go with the dialogic structure of solicitude. By contrast, in the second argument, "the respect owed to persons, posited in the second formulation of the Kantian imperative, is, on the moral plane, in the same relation to autonomy as solicitude is to the aim of the 'good life' on the ethical plane" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 222).

In this light, the interpretational problems such as those indicated in the pro-slavery and pro-abolition debates mentioned at the beginning of this paper can now be approached differently. If the pro-slavery group could see slavery from the perspective of a second-personal standpoint and solicitude, the results could be different. (Of course, the pro-slavery interpretation of the Golden Rule cannot take a second personal standpoint as it will contradict itself.) In any case, the Golden Rule demands this group to put themselves in the place of the sufferers of slavery.

⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 296. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 293-302.

The Golden Rule requires that the dissymmetry between the agent and the patient be corrected.

In the discussion thus far, my focus has been on demonstrating the possibility of moving from the ethically good (solicitude) to the morally obligatory (respect). I have attempted to show that the Golden Rule is compatible with the Kantian notion of respect. However, it must be noted that the Golden Rule proves to be superior to respect. While respect is about not causing suffering in others by doing crime against them, the function of the Golden Rule is to foster a practice of respect (by conceiving people as ends in themselves) and of neighbour-love. The neighbour-love of the Golden Rule is more than just respect. It is also important to see how these concepts can move to the social and institutional level. In what follows, we will look at how the ethical aim can translate into a common institutional life that manifests justice: that is, institutions as embodiments of justice and their relation to the rule of law.

Just Relations

Here, I must say that the ethical aim also finds its place in *just relations*. By just relations, I refer to the fundamental structures of society that serve as a framework for our togetherness. Underlying this is, again, the primacy of ethics over any kind of juridical and political arrangements and constrictions. With the idea of just relations, we come close to the notion of harmony. Just relations foster interpersonal and social harmony, which are central to the *Hatāta*.

The notion of justice within a framework of plurality demands a conception of recognition. Here, several examples can be drawn from the *Hatāta* itself as from the real-life situation of Zār'a Ya'əqob. His philosophy is a philosophy of civility that gives recognition to the givenness of diversity and the need to cohabit the earth together without considering each other as threats. We can think of religious pluralism, and other forms of multiculturalism, including various identity groups that deserve respect. With the Golden Rule, I tend to see religious pluralism, not as an extrinsic legal imposition, but an inherent trait of religion and its morality. At this point, I have in mind the value of religion, which is often neglected by secular arrangements in which religious institutions are considered as just interest groups among others (other groups that assert their identities and rights).

It is an important reminder that it is not simply the rule of law (in the positivistic sense) that binds us together. Instead, it is the functionality of shared values – however residual they have become in a late modern society that commercializes most aspects of social life. Here we can think of Golden Rule

reasoning as that which incubates or cultivates shared values. We can, thus, conclude the foregoing discussion of the conceptual movement from solicitude via norms to the rule of law with a particular interest in the Golden Rule with the following remark: the just looks in both directions to order and law (the deontological), and to the ethical aim (the teleological).

The negative formulation of the Golden Rule that we noted above – not to do to others what you do not want to be done to you – suggests a basis for the question of justice in the experience of something being done to one that leads to the recognition that something is not fair (often, whenever there is something unfair or unjust, one cries “*it's not fair!*”).⁸ It is this negative formulation of the Golden Rule – conjoined with the positive one – that plays a reparative role. Such reparative potential is often practically worked out by challenging and reconstructing social relations.

The litmus test as to whether there are just relations and whether there is a need to do a backward recourse to the ethical aim, is determined by the presence of lethal social practices: “We should not inflict any injury to any man: lie, calumny, evil speech, theft, adultery, beating, murder; all evil actions go against the order of the creator, destroy all the laws of nature, extinguish the love and harmony of which all men have an equal need” (Sumner, 1978, p. 227). What I have been arguing in this section is that the Golden Rule facilitates the passage from solicitude (A) – via norms (B) – to the just (A’).

Here, I wish to highlight that this passage is neither a unilinear phenomenon nor a conclusive achievement and that a backward recourse to the ethical aim, through the intermediation of moral norms, is possible. This implies that the social sphere needs to maintain a certain degree of porosity for reflective sobriety at the intersection of morality on the one hand and the law (order) on the other. Such consideration demonstrates the possibility of a backward recourse (by the norm) to the ethical aim in the case of the norm encountering practical

⁸ In his book *The Ethics of Zär'a Ya'Āqob: A Reply to the Historical and Religious Violence in the Seventeenth Century Ethiopia* (Rome, Italy: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2012), 267 Dawit Worku Kidane situates the Golden Rule “Treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation” in the context of justice (“justice for all members of the given society”) and that its violation is tantamount to the violation of “the spirit of fairness”; “Thus, the first foundational obligation of human beings is to love others as you would yourself, and not to do to others what you would not do to yourself” Teodros Kiros, “Zera Yacob and Ethiopian Traditional Philosophy,” *A Companion to African Philosophy*, by Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 185.

stalemates. Of course, in my own argument, my focus is not just a backward recourse to ethical solicitude; instead, it is a move to a “critical solicitude,” which is a form of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) “that has passed through the double test of the moral conditions of respect and the conflicts generated by the latter” (Ricoeur 1992, p. 273).

Final Considerations

Thus far, this article has addressed questions related to the (re)interpretation of the Golden Rule within a religious perspective, and the theoretical articulation of the Golden Rule in organizing the ethical ensemble of the *Ḥatātas* utilizing Sumner’s logical triad – the ABA’ dialectics. As discussed in the previous section, the passage is from the ethical aim of the good beginning with solicitude (A) to moral norms (B) and the just with the possibility of a backward recourse to critical solicitude (A’). The commonalities between the love commandment of the bible and the Golden Rule have been understood to indicate a symbiotic relation. The former preserves the latter from perversion or degeneration into the rule of retaliation. The latter helps to formalize the former. It is important now to ask about the implications of the preceding discussion in light of the current milieu characterized by diversity and the crisis of cohesion. In what follows, I will draw attention to three considerations pertinent to diversity and social cohesion

The first important consideration is the recognition of diversity. In the *Ḥatātas*, we find acceptance of the givenness of diversity. The account is not only about diversity or multiplicity but also about unity and harmony. The old philosophical question of the relation between the one and the many that dominated the ancient Greek philosophers also finds its expression in the *Ḥatātas*. It is important to note that religious diversity, which is explicitly mentioned in the *Ḥatātas*, is presented as a paradigmatic example that inherently implies all kinds of diversity. Thus, the acceptance of such diversity is not tantamount to acceptance of all types of chaos. Instead, a meaningful All-Unity or harmony is attached to the difference that is celebrated, and the discourse of the Golden Rule seems to have this context in the background.

Second consideration: conflict and violence – even discursive disrespect – signify the crisis of civility. The love commandment and the Golden Rule presuppose such crisis. The negative formulation of the Golden Rule assumes the possibility of diversity degenerating into intolerance, endangering peaceful coexistence. The Golden Rule stands as a reminder of the prohibition not to harm others. The intrinsic value of humanity – irrespective of its diversity – grounds the *Ḥatātas* theory of harm.

The third consideration takes us to the reparative thought embedded in the Golden Rule, which the title of this article aims at accentuating as Golden Rule reasoning. This particular reasoning fosters a second-personal standpoint whereby we place ourselves in the place of the other(s). Since one's self cannot live without and independent of another self, I ought to see the other (the ethnic other, the religious other, etc.) as the source of my own significance. We, humans, live in different relationships of significance and morality. It is, then, obligatory that we think of not only self-esteem but also the esteem of the other in order to foster just and sustainable relations.

Finally, I wish to conclude by highlighting the fact that the philosophical contribution of Claude Sumner Ethiopian philosophy is quite immense. His valuable contribution can be further developed from where he leaves off. Such an endeavour requires focusing on specific philosophical loci with a more systematic (rather than a descriptive) approach. The present article is an attempt to systematically organize the diverse ensembles of ethics and morality using a heuristic lens endemic to the *Hatätas* themselves; instead of imposing a system alien to the particular tradition. This approach has furnished us with the necessary conceptual tools to handle a local text judiciously – doing justice both to the local text as well as the universal ethical dictum, the Golden Rule.

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