

## GOLDEN RULE ETHICS AND COMPLEMENTARY LEARNING PROCESS WITH THE OTHER: FROM CONFUCIUS' AND CHRISTIAN APPROACHES TO HATATAS' APPROACH

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**ABSTRACT:** *Through the development of a comparative analysis that explores the conceptions of the Golden Rule that are expressed in the teachings of Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas, the article shows that the combined insights that emerge from these three teachings have a contemporary significance in the attempt to develop a complementary learning process with the Other. Throughout its variations, the Golden Rule is grounded on the need to treat others as how we want to be treated. Such a moral vision occupies a central importance in Confucius's ren, Christianity's Gospel of Matthew and the commandments, and the Hatatas' principle of harmony. The comparative exercise in contending conceptions of the Golden Rule that are found in Confucius', the Christian and the Hatatas' approaches leads into the emergence of a learning process that goes beyond the mere tolerance of the Other. In a globalized world, where there is a search for a moral guideline that can serve as a common source of motivation, the Golden Rule can serve as a foundation of a process of learning that is mutually supportive, supplementary and is hence complementary.*

**Keywords:** *Christianity, complementary learning, Confucius, Hatatas, otherness*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the cultural diversity that is found in the world, the Golden Rule is still a universal moral rule that is grounded on the need to treat others as how we want to be treated. It is expressed through “rule of relationships based on reciprocity” (Apressyan 2020, 110). Through the appeal to a moral rule that recognizes the common humanity of others and allows us to develop relations of reversibility, the Golden Rule occupies a central place in the search for an underlying moral doctrine that is able to serve as a common source of motivation (Gensler 2013). In a world where substantive conceptions of the good that are grounded on the existence of a metaphysical reality are being met with scepticism, the commitment to the Golden Rule contributes to the

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emergence of a moral principle that is able to creatively synthesize the teachings of different moral philosophies.

The Golden Rule is a moral principle that is grounded on the need to identify a common ground between the interests of the moral agent and the interests of others. Without dissolving the interests of the ego in the name of sacrificing one's interest for others, the Golden Rule allows us to engage in a reciprocal relationship with others. It is grounded on the assumption, "I wish to be happy, therefore I must endeavour to make others happy" (Cadoux 1912, 280). The Golden Rule serves as a foundation of societal solidarity in being able to introduce a moral ideal that does not posit a relationship of opposition between private interest and the wellbeing of others. To such an extent, the Golden Rule is grounded on the need for "universal impartiality and interpersonal care and love" (Wang 1999, 420). It shows us that we should treat others as we would want to be treated by them and that there is a need to create a normative space that is grounded on the affirmation of mutually serving interests among individuals who are interacting with one another.

One of the unique features of the Golden Rule is that it is developed in diverging forms in secular and religious traditions. One observes the "simultaneous appearance of the Golden Rule in various cultures" (Guseinor 2014, 44). The Golden Rule in all of its variations has the capacity of retaining a genuine care for others and showing love and care for others that are different from us (Bruton 2004). The Golden Rule has strong implications in the quest to identify a moral approach that is able to introduce a complementary process of learning. Rather than subsuming the Other within the canons of one's own existence, the Golden Rule allows us to develop an approach that is founded on the celebration of differences (Duxbury 2008). It allows individuals that are coming from different backgrounds to cultivate commonly shared values.

Upholding the Golden Rule does not require a commitment to a particular metaphysical doctrine or a given ideological orientation. In its religious forms, the Golden Rule is expressed in terms of the "ways in which God enters into a personal relation with us" (Porter 2014, 18). The secular aspect in return shows us that we should show the proper amount of care that we want others to reciprocate. A community of moral agents that are coming from different backgrounds can all appeal to the Golden Rule in their attempt to find an approach that is founded on the affirmation of their humanity beyond any form of moral calculation (Allinson 1992). There is an ethics of care that underlies the Golden Rule in the attempt to show care and love for others whom we (should) treat in the same manner we want to treat us.

Comparative studies of the Golden Rule so far focused on the need to understand religious foundations, cultural variations and historical developments (Allinson 1992). These attempts were motivated by the attempt to make sense of the commonalities that are found among different ethical traditions and the metaphysical doctrines and worldviews that underlie different formulations of the Golden Rule (Liu 2015). Consequently, one thing that needs to be explored in reference to the contemporary relevance of the Golden Rule is its place in the understanding of otherness and the attempt to develop an ethics of interpersonal care that can help us to envision a complementary process of learning towards the Other. Taking this into consideration,

this article explores the role that Confucius's teaching, Christianity and Hatatas versions of the Golden Rule can play in the development of a mutually supportive and supplementary process of learning.

Confucius's version of the Golden Rule is formulated as *ren* (Allinson 1992, 174). Within Christianity, the Golden Rule is framed in terms of ethical living for Christians and the need to extend how we would like to be treated for others. Such a formulation of the Golden Rule encompasses an "understanding of vulnerability to all of life" (Anderson and Fiddes 2020, 51). Lastly, the formulation of the Golden Rule in the Hatatas is grounded on the harmony of nature principle and the moral duty to love others (Zara Yacob and Walda Heywat 2023). These three formulations of the Golden Rule are unified in their affirmation of the inherent value and dignity of the individual and the need to cultivate a virtuous form of moral conduct that serves as a foundation of social cohesion. All of them are grounded on the principle of reversibility and the need to recognize the common humanity of others.

The article starts out by discussing Confucius's conception of the Golden Rule through an analysis of *ren*, the cultivation of virtuous relationships and the need to realize societal harmony. This is followed by the discussion of the Christian understanding of the Golden Rule through a focus on the Gospel of Matthew and the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments. After this comes the discussion of the Golden Rule within the Hatatas tradition that is situated in the context of the equality of human beings and the harmony that is being expressed in nature. Once the different formulations of the Golden Rule have been discussed, there will be a comparative discussion that is devoted to the similarities and the differences that are found between the three traditions in their understanding of the Golden Rule. Finally it will be argued that the combined insights of the three traditions serves as a foundation of a new approach that allows us to develop a process of learning and dialogue with the Other.

## 2. CONFUCIUS' APPROACH TO THE GOLDEN RULE

Among the three conceptions of the Golden Rule that will be comparatively discussed in this paper having the aim of developing a complementary process of learning with the Other, the first one constitutes the way of the *ren* that has been introduced by Confucius. There is a need to understand that the Confucian version of the Golden Rule is not developed in the form of a metaphysical doctrine that has the aim of providing a transcendent foundation that can serve as the foundation of the ideal community. On the contrary, the main issue that Confucius grapples with is the development of a conception of moral excellence that can serve as a foundation of a harmonious societal order where each and every member of the community is able to fulfil their obligations and duties. In the version of the Golden Rule that has been introduced by Confucius, *ren* occupies a central place and it is the extension of *ren* into the realm of interpersonal relations that leads into the development of the principle of reversibility as the guiding glue of human conduct.

Although different interpretations of the Confucian conception of the Golden Rule have been developed so far, still, the one compelling analysis that shows us the need to

separate Confucianism and its different brands from the teachings of Confucius on the Golden Rule has been introduced by Bo Mou (2004). Such an interpretation tells us that the dominant interpretations of the Confucian version of the Golden Rule err in assuming that *ren* can be identified with the essence of a love that is able to go beyond boundaries and encompass a spirit of interconnections that show the care and love that human beings are able to display within the intersubjective dimension of human existence. Mou shows us that *ren* as a moral excellence could even be conceived without being applied to the domain of interpersonal relations and that it should be primarily understood as a moral excellence that has a value on its own.

In the interpretation of the Confucius Golden Rule that has been introduced by Mou (2004), we need to concentrate on the nature of *Shu* and *Zhong* in order to capture the true nature of the Golden Rule. In such a context, *Shu* is being mainly conceived as the methodological aspect whereas *Zhong* is being understood as the process of examining the ego and the bounds of one's constituted selfhood that culminates in the regulation of one's mode of conduct. Mou argues that "the methodological aspect of *Shu* consists of the principles of both reversibility and extensibility" (Mou 2004, 218). This testifies to the fact that the process of self-discovery that starts out within the parameters of one's ego eventually leads into the emergence of an ethics of interpersonal relations that is able to engulf the need to show a genuine responsibility for the Other. Mou delves into the analysis of Confucius' Analects as a way of arriving at the conclusion that *Shu* could be understood as the essence of the principle of extensibility and the need to treat and establish others in a manner that we desire to be established by them. Such an act of moral agency also constitutes the need to refrain from hurting others just like we do not want them to inflict some form of damage on us.

Mou's interpretation of the Confucius Golden Rule also assumes that there is an inseparable relationship that is found between *Shu* and *ren*. This is revealed in the need to advance the interests of others in the same manner that we want their mode of individual moral agency to be developed in order to encompass our interests. To such an extent, "the two versions share the same core idea to the effect that one can use one's own desire as a guide to how to treat others" (Mo 2004, 221). The mere separation that is developed between the ego and the Other is being overcome in the focus on treating others in the analogical manner that we want to be treated by them. Mou further argues that we have two basic components that are found in the Confucius' Golden Rule. First of all, *ren* is being identified as the essential form of moral excellence that shows us the reciprocal connection between the ways in which we want to be treated and the kind of treatment that we should also extend to the other individual. In such a moral conception, "the principle of extensibility would provide a distinct moral reference to regulate how to treat others" (Mo 2004, 228). Secondly, it is shown that the self-reflection that begins at the level of individual habit is being extended in a manner that is able to encompass our treatment of other individuals. This testifies to the fact that interpersonal relation is not to be equated with the nature of *ren* as such but its extension into the realm of interpersonal relations.

Mou's analysis of the Confucius Golden Rule argues that we are able to identify internal and external starting points within the understanding of the Golden Rule. One

as such comes across the internal starting point of *ren* and the external starting point of *Zhong*. The internal starting point deals with the process of self-cultivation and the need to overcome the obsession with the isolated ego while the external standpoint shows the need to incorporate such a mode of relationship to other human beings. What this demonstrates is that *Zhong* is the external standpoint of *ren* as it is being revealed within the fabric of daily human connections and the moral rules that need to guide human conduct. Hence, “Confucius’ version of the Golden Rule is considered to be intrinsically connected with two important concepts in the *Analects-Shu and Zhong*” (Mou 2004, 230). *Ren* is not just interpersonal love and care and needs to be identified with the methodological component of *Shu* and the principles of reversibility and extensibility. This shows us that mode of conduct starts out within the inner process of self-cultivation and is then being extended to the external realm of interpersonal relations.

For Confucius, it is up to the individual to attain a level of self-mastery that can be extended to the fabric of the daily relationships that are being developed with the other members of the community. Accordingly, “young people should be filial at home” (Confucius 2007, 16). Still, Mou shows us that filial piety needs to be understood as an extension of *ren*. Hence, “filial piety as a virtue is not yet the most fundamental virtue as a whole: it is one significant manifestation or extension of the fundamental virtue, *ren*, in how to treat parents” (Mou 2020, 240). Such a development of a moral excellence manifests itself in kindness, forgiving and having goodwill towards others. The inherent dignity and value of others is being maintained and this mainly expresses itself in *ren* and in being humane and benevolent towards others (Li 2022). In such a context, *ren* can be understood as “benevolence, love, kindness, compassion, magnanimity, perfect virtue, goodness, human heartedness, humanity” (Dy 2013, 65). It is within the *Analects* that Confucius offers a broader discussion of *ren*. *Ren* is here depicted as a quality that is found within the virtuous individual and is something that is practiced within day to day relations.

Confucius emphasised the role that is played by self-cultivation as the starting point of *ren*. Thus he affirms the “supreme value of self-development” (Lawrenz 2021, 12). It is only when the human subject exercises a profound form of self-mastery that this individual will have the moral dispositions that are needed to serve the other members of the community. In the attempt to attain this form of self-control, there are different virtues that the individual needs to cultivate. In such a moral vision, “humaneness is the beauty of the community” (Confucius 2007, 32). These virtues appear in the form of kindness, empathy and sincerity. Kindness allows the person to sacrifice one’s interests and overcome the obsession with the ego while empathy allows us to position ourselves within the world of others. Such a moral excellence could be seen as “fairness and concern for others” (Rakhshani 2017, 468). Sincerity in return is situated in the need to be honest and truthful to others. It is only and only after they are being mastered by the individual and are being exhibited within the moral conduct of the person, that the virtues are extended to the level of the community.

Rituals occupied a greater place in Confucius’s understanding of interpersonal care and the need to love one’s neighbours (Lee 2022). Rituals were seen as particular sites

and spaces where individuals practically demonstrate their love and care for their parents, ancestors and rulers. Hence, “to Master the self and return to ritual is to be humane” (Confucius 2007, 80). Thus, what the Confucian tradition emphasizes is “human commonalities but within asymmetrical political contexts” (Lee 2022, 355). The whole societal order and its maintenance rest on the usage of rituals as ways through which the moral character of the youth was being moulded in reference to the need for benevolence. What is important is the overall flourishing of the society and for this to be realized, there is a need to act in accordance with the principle of reversibility. Such a concern with mutual interest also constitutes a cornerstone of Christianity.

### 3. CHRISTIANITY AND THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS

Whereas Confucius’s understanding of the Golden Rule was mainly formulated in the form of *ren*, the Christian idea of such a rule in return is founded on the principle of reversibility and its adequate application which is based on the 2nd Commandment that is in return grounded on the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment. This is mainly found in the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Matthew and shows the need to develop a selfless form of moral agency that resides in the need to recognize the value and the dignity of the other person (Swidler 2019). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’s teachings are being given to his disciples and we get to have a vision of the Golden Rule in the teaching on the Kingdom of God and its essence and values. Here Jesus Christ teaches his disciples to do to others what they want others to do to them (Park 2020). This leads into the development of a moral vision that is expressed in being kind to others, the embodiment of fairness and the showing of a genuine respect for others.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Golden Rule of loving one’s neighbours as oneself is introduced as the second greatest commandment. The need to submit one’s body and soul to God as an embodiment of the love of God is introduced as the first greatest commandment (Kister 2022). The second greatest commandment is in return identified as the need to love one’s neighbour as oneself. This is the foundation of one’s love for others. It leads into the emergence of a form of moral agency that is expressed in selflessness, compassion and empathy (Topel 1998). The human subject is not merely immersed in one’s individual existence and the bounds of one’s existence are being extended in order to encompass the interests of others. Furthermore, our relations with others are dictated by the need to embody divine love as a guiding force that allows us to be compassionate towards others.

The Christian understanding of the Golden Rule is seen as the embodiment of the love of Jesus Christ within the bounds of interpersonal relations (Zecha 2011). This is a selfless form of subjectivity that seeks to overcome the opposition that is found between the self and the Other. The Other is not seen as an alien that poses a threat to one’s existence. In place of the classical opposition between the Self and the Other, the Christian Golden Rule introduces a spirit of identifying the other with oneself (Hundert 2001). Such a dialectics of otherness does not lead into the subsuming of the Other within the bounds of one’s subjectivity. On the contrary, it assumes that there is a need

to embody a selfless form of moral conduct that was personified in the life and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The basic tenet of this Golden Rule is the need to love not only friends but also one's enemies.

The Golden Rule within the Christian tradition is seen as the foundation of forgiveness, love and selflessness. The highest form of individual existence within such a moral universe is expressed by the need to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others. This constitutes an "expansion of one's ego/self beyond the cage of one's skin" (Swidler 2019, 287). The relationship among selves is not situated within the prism of utilitarian relations and a calculation from the perspective of the isolated ego. The whole idea of love is seen as the embodiment of Jesus Christ and human beings are expected to lead a life of benevolence and compassion (Tullberg 2012). This understanding sees the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an act of love that is unbounded. The idea of sacrificing oneself for others is situated as the expression of the transcendent force of love that has the capacity of transforming human relations. In such a context, loving one's neighbours is part of a process of participating in the common humanity of others.

The commandment to love one's neighbour within the Christian tradition is part of the process of loving God in all our essence. The neighbour and the self are not being placed in a hierarchical structure that introduces a relationship of binary between the dominant self and the Other. On the contrary, they are both manifestation of the love of God (Cofnas 2022). One of the features of this idea of interpersonal care is that it is a love that goes beyond passion and sentiments. It is not a form of love that is being born out of utilitarian desires and calculations (Gortner 2011). The person that loves is genuinely concerned with the wellbeing and the welfare of others. Within the bounds of the interpersonal relations that have been established, it is the idea of sacrificing oneself that is serving as the highest ideal.

The Christian conception of the Golden Rule sees God as love. It is informed by an unbounded and an all encompassing conception of love that is able to express itself within daily human relations. In the realm of daily human interactions, it expresses itself in "an element of reciprocity" (Bakker 2013, 43). It shows that there is a need to develop a positive action towards others. It is not the mere affirmation and the passive acknowledgment of others that is required. Going beyond a mere affirmation, the Christian Golden Rule encompasses the need to actively promote the best interests of others just like we want them to reciprocate such a form of moral agency (Topel 1998). This serves as a foundation of justice and fairness as we are able to respect and actively promote the interests of others without having to reduce them into the bounds of one's own existence.

In the end, the Christian formulation of the Golden Rule shows us that the spirit of interpersonal relations needs to be founded on the idea of showing a genuine care for others and seeking the spirit of reversibility in one's interactions with others (White 2014). This is a key principle that serves as the foundation of societal healing and reconciliation as it is standing against the idea of seeking revenge. It is expressed in the need to show mercy for others and it is love that is being situated as the greatest virtue. Within both the Confucian and the Christian traditions, interpersonal care and showing

a genuine interest in actively promoting the interests of others occupies a central place (Allinson 1992). Still, Confucius justifies such a spirit of reversibility without referring to a metaphysical entity whereas Christianity is grounded on the ever presence of the absolute.

#### 4. HATATAS' VERSION OF THE GOLDEN RULE

As a moral ideal that is founded on the principle of reversibility, the Golden Rule is found within the teachings of both secular and religious traditions. Just like it expresses itself in *ren* in Confucius and the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment that is founded on the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment in Christianity, another way of exploring the place that is occupied by this rule is to look at the Hatatas. The Hatatas refer to two texts that occupy a greater place within the broader debate on the existence of Ethiopian philosophy (Sumner 1999). On one side of the debate are those who argue that these texts which are both called Hatata are authored by Ethiopian thinkers (Abera 2016: Kiros 1998) while on the other hand are those who maintain that they constitute part and parcel of a Missionary discourse within the Ethiopian soil (Kibret 2019). Leaving aside the debate on the authorship of the Hatatas, we can still explore the basic themes that are found within these texts and one way of doing this is to concentrate on the conception of the Golden Rule that is found in the Hatatas.

The principle of reversibility is provided in the Hatatas as one main moral principle that is inferred from the principle of harmony. This principle of reversibility is discussed in the different parts of the Hatatas. It appears is in the discussion of human intelligence and its ability to discover the principle of reversibility. In such a discussion it is stated that “our intelligence says, don’t do to human beings what you don’t want them to do to you, but rather do to others what you want them to do to you” (Zara Yacob and Walda Heywat 2023, 87). It is emphasized that human beings have the ability of discovering a moral principle that shows them that they should treat others the way one would like to be treated by others. It is further stated in the Hatatas that one should always promote the interests of others just like we want others to establish us and that I should “love my brothers and sisters” (*ibid.*, 122). The idea of developing reversible relations with others takes a centre stage in such an analysis.

The principle of reversibility stems from the equality of all the human beings that are found in the world and the fact that they should cooperate with others in order to create a better world. In the fabric of such social relations, it is stated in the Hatatas that “mutual love improves all human life” (*ibid.*, 133). The individual needs to seek peaceful relations with others and there is a need to develop a form of moral agency that is “willing to delight everyone” (*op.cit.*). There are no relations of antagonisms between oneself and others and the individual’s relationship with others needs to be dictated by the need to “join them in mutual love and aid” (*ibid.*, 121). The Hatatas as such see the human moral agent as having the ability of developing a form of conduct that is founded on the need to treat others the way one would like to be treated by others.

Although it is rooted within the Christian tradition, still the Golden Rule that is found in the Hatatas does not emanate out of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment and the love for



God and the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment and the love for one's neighbours. To such an extent, the teaching of the Golden Rule that is found in the Hatatas is not grounded on scriptural interpretation and the commandments of God. The Hatatas accept God as the creator and also recognize the Ten Commandments as a source of moral inspiration although they tell us that our understanding of moral truth should not be grounded on the scriptures since these scriptures are prone to error since they are being interpreted by human beings. In return, our understanding of the Golden Rule needs to be founded on our intelligence and its ability to discover the principle of harmony. In developing a sceptical attitude towards the scriptures, the Hatatas tell us "if you scrutinize books, you will quickly find in them perverted wisdom" (*ibid.*, 113). In also emphasizing the role that is played by human beings in developing a distorted understanding of the scriptures, the Hatatas tell us "never believe what is written in books except that content which you have scrutinized and found to be truthful" (*ibid.*, 113). Thus, we are told to only accept things that are understood by our intelligence rather than based on scriptural interpretations.

The principle of reversibility that is found in the Hatatas, needs to be located as part and parcel of the broader principle of harmony. The principle of reversibility in the Hatatas is an extension of the principle of harmony as it is being applied to the domain of interpersonal relations. The Hatatas reveal an understanding of the ideal ethical conduct that is founded on the assumption that the will of God as a transcendent force reveals itself both within the natural world and also in the context of human relations. It is the duty of human beings to look for the harmony that is found in the world and "human beings shouldn't live in a way that isn't true to their nature" (*ibid.*, 99). The kind of God that is revealed to us in the Hatatas is a Christian God although the Hatatas are not just content with celebrating God as a higher force whose will needs to be followed in the form of commandments. It is said in the Hatatas that "all that God has made is excellent in the very way he made it" (*ibid.*, 115). It is not the scriptures but our intellect which allows us to discover the beauty of God's creations which is the aspect of the principle of harmony.

In the Hatatas, it is the human intellect and not the scriptures that are the foundations of truth. Such a thinking capacity allows us to discover the principle of harmony. In defining the nature of the principle of harmony, the Hatatas state that we should engage in "actions that are in harmony with our intelligence, and beneficial for our life and all human lives" (*ibid.*, 88). Our intelligence allows us to discover the underlying order that is found in the world as part of God's grand design. The moral agent needs to liberate oneself from scriptural interpretations that are prone to error and learn to discover the hidden order that is found in the world. Based on our intelligence we need to marvel "at the beauty of God's creatures, each in its established order" (*ibid.*, 96). The principle of harmony reveals to us that there is an underlying order that reveals itself in the perfection of the natural world and the equality of human beings in the social world. This principle shows that, "everything is majestic and wonderful" (*ibid.*, 96). In terms of the relationship between the principle of harmony and the foundation of Christianity, one sees that the Hatatas use human intellect to discover the nature of God, the Golden rule and the nature of the physical world. To such an extent, it is only

partially based on scriptures and the Ten Commandments which are the foundations of human conduct. Every form of truth is subjected to the human intellect and the Hatatas do not give a place for scriptural and revealed truths like the Christian tradition.

To such an extent, the Golden Rule in the Hatatas does not emanate from the Ten Commandments just like the Christian version of the Golden Rule but from the idea that the essence of God is going to be revealed in the principle of harmony and that it is up to the individual to use one's intellect as a way of discovering the perfect order that is being revealed in the societal and the natural realms. The principle of harmony in the social world is expressed in the equality of all individual human beings while in the physical world; it is expressed in the form of the beauty of God's creations.

The one moral principle that dictates the spirit of relations that are found within human beings according to the Hatatas is the principle of harmony. This principle teaches us that God exists as the source of all creations and that it can be regarded as the ultimate case that is responsible for all the things that exist in the world. It is assumed that "all truth and wisdom are from God" (*ibid.*, 113). Still, the God that is being celebrated in the Hatatas is one that is characterized by the elements of transcendence and immanence. On one hand, just like the God of Christianity, it is a transcendent God that is not just limited to space and time. At the same time, there is also an element of immanence in the conception of God. God does not just exist as it is as a perfect reality. It reveals itself in the order that is found in the natural world and also in the equality among individual human beings that is found in the social domain of human existence. It is shown in the Hatatas that "God created all human beings as equals" (*ibid.*, 131). One of the manifestations of the principle of harmony according to the Hatatas is the Golden Rule which teaches us that we should affirm the equal worth and dignity of all the human beings that are found in the world.

The ultimate source of truth is our intelligence and it points towards the principle of harmony which is founded on the harmony that is found in the social and natural worlds. This can in return be regarded as the concrete manifestation of a God that is endowed with both transcendent and also immanent manifestations. The principle of harmony teaches us that "God's work within all creation is wonderful" (*ibid.*, 122). In practical terms, the value of the principle of harmony is to be measured in terms of the building of the ideal community that is founded on the equality of individuals.

Just like Confucius' understanding of the Golden Rule, the Hatatas' interpretation of such a rule emphasizes the role that is played by filial piety in the building of the ideal community. The Hatatas to such an extent teach us that we should respect others and that the love and care that one owes to one's parents should also be extended to the other members of the community. It instructs us that "for we want other human beings to perform those acts of mercy for us, and we should do for others what we are able to" (*ibid.*, 87). Still, the foundations of the Hatatas conception of the Golden Rule is radically different since it operates out of the principle of harmony rather than the moral excellence of *ren* which occupies a greater place in the views of Confucius. The Hatatas teach us that it is the "creator who fashioned us with the faculties of reason and speech" (*ibid.*, 70). Such faculties that are being given to human beings are going to be utilized

for the purpose of discovering the harmony and the underlying order that is found in the world.

The idea of the Golden Rule that is found in the Hatatas is grounded on the idea that the love for one's neighbours could be seen as a solution to the all the hate and the evil acts that are found in the world. It is assumed that human beings have a duty to love others and that "God did not create man to be evil" (Sumner 1976, 8). The conflicts that exist among the members of different religions are presented in the Hatatas as a deviation from the divine will of God which expresses itself in the harmony that is found in the world. The source of the destruction and evil acts is the hate and the feeling of jealousy that individuals exhibit towards one another. Against this, there is a focus on feeling of reversibility which starts with a "respect for parents" (Kiros 1996, 48). In order to overcome the feeling of hate and animosity that is found among individuals, there is a need to affirm the equal worth and dignity that is given to all individuals.

From a comparative perspective one is able to locate three elements of African and Ethiopian cultural orientations within the teaching of the Golden Rule that is found in the Hatatas. First of all, there is the emphasis on ancestral moral authority in the Hatatas. The Hatatas tell us that as part of observing the Golden Rule we should follow the ancestral rule which shows that "human beings shouldn't live in a way that isn't true to their nature" (Zara Yacob and Welda Heywat 2023, 99). The nature of human beings is to lead a morally virtuous life in accordance with the principle of harmony which also recognizes ancestors as occupying a higher position in providing a moral compass that needs to be imitated by living human beings. The Golden Rule is thus not situated from the perspective of isolated individual rights that is given a paramount importance in the Western perspective but a spirit of interdependence between human beings and their ancestors. Secondly, the Hatatas emphasized the role that is played by spirits alongside human intelligence. These spirits are used to characterize "tame and wild animals" (*ibid.*, 116). These spirits represent animals that have been inhabited by human beings and thus that are found in the natural world. Thus it is not Western instrumental rationality but spirits and a holistic picture of the world that is found in such a moral universe. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on social harmony in the Hatatas and this is a uniquely Ethiopian and African element that is sharply contrasted to the Western emphasis on the rights of the individual. The Hatatas tell us to "be in harmony with everyone, in love and peace" (*ibid.*, 134). This role that is given to societal harmony is one of the unique features when seen from the perspective of elements of an Ethiopian and African philosophical tradition.

##### 5. COMPARISON OF THE THREE CONCEPTIONS OF THE GOLDEN RULE

The Golden Rule that is founded on the principle of reversibility and the need to realize the good of others is developed in the form of *ren*, the commandments and the principle of harmony within the teachings of Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas. In developing a comparative analysis of conceptions of the Golden Rule within the three traditions, there are three basic similarities that come across. First of all, the idea of treating others with respect occupies a central place in conceptions of the Golden Rule

that are developed in Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas. In Confucius, the respect for the Other is a component of the form of self-mastery that needs to be cultivated by the moral agent and is then being extended to other human relations (Dy 2014). Christianity in the form of a commandment teaches us that we should love and respect our neighbours beyond any immediate considerations (Guseinov 2014). The Hatatas in return are founded on the need to extend care and respect for others.

Secondly, these three conceptions of the Golden Rule are all dictated by the idea of reversibility. The object of moral decision-making is not the isolated interests of the individual whose status is being established in reference to the common good. Reversibility is seen as a principle that is the foundation of societal cohesion (Tullberg 2012). In Confucius, seeking mutually benefiting relations serves as a foundation of societal solidarity and allows individuals to serve the functions that are expected from them by the members of the community. Christianity in return shows that one's neighbour is not an enemy or a competitor but an autonomous subject who should be given the same level of love and care that we demand from others (Porter 2014). The Hatatas in return show that all human beings are equal to one another and that there is a need to pursue the best interests of others.

Thirdly, all Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas are founded on the need for self-cultivation and the development of a virtuous form of moral conduct by the individual. In Confucius, this is seen in the virtues of kindness, sincerity and empathy and is grounded on the assumption that the ideal relations in the family serve as a foundation of societal cohesion. What is of a greater importance is "filial love for parents or divine love for God" (Liu 2015, 233). The Christian tradition shows that the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of others is the highest form of sacrifice that can be developed by the individual. Lastly, the Hatata tradition shows us that human beings should cultivate interpersonal care as the main purpose of societal existence (Kiros 1998).

When one looks at the differences between the conceptions of the Golden Rule as it is developed in the three traditions, it is seen that there are two main differences. First of all, there are differences in terms of the foundations of the Golden Rule. In the case of Confucius, the concern is with the social order rather than the appeal to the existence of a transcendent being like the cases of Christianity and the Hatatas traditions. The development of the Golden Rule in Confucius can be explained without positing the existence of a higher being that serves as a source of moral goodness (Lee 2023). What is important is creating a society that is made up of virtuous individuals in the case of Confucius. In Christianity and the Hatata tradition, the Golden Rule emerges out of a higher metaphysical truth. Christianity's Golden Rule cannot operate without God's commandments and the need to absolutely submit oneself to a higher authority. The Hatatas' Golden Rule is founded on the principle of harmony that is regarded as the extension of the will of God (Abera 2016).

Secondly, there are differences in the conceptions of the Golden Rule when one looks at the place that is given to the individual. Although reversibility and the need to sacrifice oneself and promote the wellbeing of others occupy a greater place within Confucius, Christianity and Hatatas traditions, still it is Christianity that gives a

profound place to the individual. The Hatatas also place a greater space for societal order and wellbeing. Christianity shows us that it is the individual human subject that features as the starting point of moral inquiry. This is developed in terms of the religious person who sacrifices his interest for the good of others in Christianity.

So far we have identified the different formulations of the Golden Rule within Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas traditions. We have also identified the similarities and the differences that are found between these conceptions. Based on this there is a need to identify the contemporary significance of the formulations of the Golden Rule. This allows us to demonstrate that this ethical rule is not obsolete and that a comparative exercise that is founded on the combined insights of different ethical traditions could be used in order to resolve contemporary society's predicaments. As such, we can apply the synthesized and the combined insights that are emerging from the three traditions in reference to the need to develop a complementary process of learning towards the Other.

## 6. COMPLEMENTARY LEARNING PROCESS WITH THE OTHER

The value of the Golden Rule and its capacity in terms of introducing a moral guideline that is able to bestow a common sense of moral conduct in the lives of individuals that are coming from different backgrounds needs to be explored in the contemporary world where there is a crisis of moral legitimacy. As we have seen in the previous sections, the Golden Rule occupies a central place in the moral visions that have been introduced in the teachings of Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas. Whereas *ren* as a moral excellence being extended into the realm of social interactions occupies a greater place in the teachings of Confucius on the Golden Rule, the version of Christianity on the Golden Rule in return was grounded on the first and second commandments. The Hatatas tradition in return concentrated on the principle of harmony as revealing itself in the domain of interpersonal relations. The creative insights that have been synthesized out of these three distinct interpretations can allow us to develop a mutually supportive and supplementary (thus complementary) learning process.

The Golden Rule's inherent principle of reversibility, coupled with its fundamental principle of shared interpersonal love and care, serves to nurture, promote and guide individuals in the profound act of empathetic perspective-taking from a place of genuine benevolence. By embracing the principle of reversibility, seeking to understand others' experiences by putting oneself in their shoes, and Confucius' principle of extensibility, extending one's moral development to assist others in their journey of self-improvement and social betterment, individuals are able to establish a basic framework of mutual support and complementarity. This framework allows for a comprehensive evaluation of each other's moral virtues and character, facilitates shared moral growth, facilitates the harmonious fulfilment of societal roles, and creates a shared sense of destiny within the broader human community.

The idea of a complementary learning process with the Other is founded on the writings of Bo Mou dealing with "overall-complementary-seeking" as a general methodological approach to how to look at contraries (including human contraries in

interpersonal relation as well as contraries as different approaches/theories (Mou 2020). Through an analysis of the yin-yang model and the Hegelian model, Mou presents us with a process of learning for the Other that is defined by two main features where “one is capturing/seeking complementarity; the other is achieving harmonious balance” (Mou 2020, 207). This learning process is not just content with the simple need to tolerate and recognize the Other. One can even tolerate the Other without necessarily being engaged in a process of learning that is able to contribute to the emergence of a world civilization that is able to appropriate different insights from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, what we need to emphasize is the need to accept others and create a better world that is founded on the development of a competence that can allow us to engage in a process of learning with others that are coming from different backgrounds (White 2014). There are three main features of such a learning process.

First of all, it is not animated by the mere need to recognize the differences that are found between different forms of life, cultural backgrounds and modalities of existence. It plays a constructive and an active role in the emergence of new values that are representatives of the different backgrounds that they have been drawn from. Only identifying the differences that are found between different cultures is not important. Since we are living in a world of globalization where human beings are dependent on each other, there is a need for the emergence of a process of learning that is able to broaden our horizons and leads into the formation of new forms of values and identities.

Secondly, the process of learning allows us to construct a shared world. Through the dialogue that we have entered into with others, we get to form new norms and values that lead in to a constructive engagement and the creation of a new world where existing identities are going to melt and give way to new forms of life. For Mou this testifies to “the mutual supportive and supplementary nature and status of contraries” (Mou 2020, 211). It is an invitation to delve into the modes of existence of others and to create analogous structural patterns that can allow us to engage in a process of learning (Swidler 1983). This is supported by Confucius’s focus on the principle of reversibility and the teachings of Christianity on the need to extend the love of God for others. It is also founded on the Hatatas’ emphasis on the need to create an ideal community where we seek to help others. Thirdly, the process of learning that has been introduced is mutually supportive since it does not lead into the imposition of one cultural value over others. It is a learning process that does not separate between fixed forms of identities. It identifies human beings that are situated in different cultural contexts as delving into each other’s world having the aim of creating a new synthesis.

The process of learning is not just limited to the attempt to recognize others and affirm the differences that are found between different conceptions of human values. We must actively participate in a shared conception of identity. By going beyond the attitude of being passively tolerant towards others, there is a need for a mutually supportive learning process that is able to invest in the emergence of new values (Gortner 2011). The focus should not be on the limits of understanding but the world that we are able to build together.

## 7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is crucial to explore the value and potential of the Golden Rule as a moral guide in a world facing a crisis of moral legitimacy. The teachings of Confucius, Christianity and the Hatatas demonstrate the central role of the Golden Rule in their respective moral visions, stressing concepts like *ren*, the commandments, and harmony in interpersonal interactions. Through the synthesis of insights from these interpretations, a complementary learning process can be developed, in which mutual support and complementarity is encouraged. The Golden Rule's principle of reversibility, along with the principle of shared interpersonal love and care, nurtures individuals in the act of empathetic perspective-taking driven by genuine benevolence. A framework of mutual support is established by embracing reversibility and extending moral development to helping others. This framework allows for the evaluation of moral virtues and character, facilitates shared moral growth, harmonizes social roles, and fosters a sense of common destiny within the human community.

The process of learning goes beyond mere tolerance and recognition of the other; it aims at learning together and at contributing to a world civilization that makes use of insights from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This process has three key characteristics. First, it involves the active identification and construction of new values that are representative of diverse backgrounds. Second, it encourages dialogue and the formation of shared norms and values that lead to the creation of new worlds, where identity is transmuted into new ways of living. Third, the learning process is mutually supportive, refusing the imposition of one cultural value over others and seeking to create a new synthesis. Learning goes beyond recognizing and affirming different human values. It requires active participation in a shared sense of identity. Instead of passive tolerance, a mutually supportive learning process is needed to foster the emergence of new values. The focus should be not only on understanding boundaries, but on the shared world that can be built together.

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