

THE GOLDEN RULE OF MORALITY: HISTORICAL- PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

A REGRA DE OURO DA MORALIDADE: ANÁLISE HISTÓRICO-FILOSÓFICA

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Abstract: The article offers an analysis of the genesis of the Golden Rule of morality and an overview of its initial historical evidence. Based on written sources from ancient cultural monuments, the authors conduct a comparative analysis of the general in the ethical assessment of human behavior, actions, and deeds. The fundamental idea of the Golden Rule is treating others as one wishes to be treated. However, its application in specific situations may necessitate considering the distinctiveness of the situation and its participants. What may be right in one culture or religion may not be in others, necessitating a skillful understanding of the context and details of each case. The Golden Rule can serve as a universal principle applicable in any situation, but it requires flexibility and the ability to account for each situation's unique aspects to achieve the best outcome for everyone involved.

Keywords: Ethics. Traditions. Morality. Ethnos.

Resumo: O artigo oferece uma análise sucinta da gênese da Regra de Ouro da moralidade e uma visão geral de sua evidência histórica inicial. Com base em fontes escritas de monumentos culturais antigos, os autores realizam uma análise comparativa do geral na avaliação ética do comportamento, das ações e dos atos humanos. A ideia fundamental da Regra de Ouro é tratar os outros como gostaríamos de ser tratados. No entanto, sua aplicação em situações específicas pode exigir que se considere a peculiaridade da situação e de seus participantes. O que pode ser correto em uma cultura ou religião pode não ser em outras, exigindo uma compreensão hábil do contexto e dos detalhes de cada caso. A Regra de Ouro pode servir como um princípio universal aplicável em qualquer situação, mas requer flexibilidade e a capacidade de levar em conta os aspectos exclusivos de cada situação para obter o melhor resultado para todos os envolvidos.

Palavras-chave: Ética. Tradições. Moralidade. Ethnos.

1. Introduction

It is important for society to stick with core traditional values while also accepting world-shared values because this allows for a balanced and cohesive social fabric. Traditional values are often deeply rooted in a society's history, heritage, and cultural identity. They provide a sense of belonging and continuity, connecting individuals to their past and shaping their shared identity. Preserving these core values helps maintain cultural diversity and fosters a sense of pride and belonging within a community. Traditional values often serve as a foundation for social stability and cohesion. They provide a framework for individuals to understand their roles, responsibilities, and expectations within society. When people adhere to commonly accepted values, it promotes trust, cooperation, and a sense of solidarity among community members. While preserving traditional values is important, societies also need to adapt and evolve to meet the challenges of a changing world. Embracing world-shared values allows for the incorporation of new perspectives, ideas, and cultural practices from different parts of the globe. This enables societies to progress, learn from others, and address contemporary issues effectively.

By striking a balance between core traditional values and world-shared values, societies can maintain a sense of identity and stability while also embracing progress, inclusivity, and respect for universal principles. It is through this balance and dialogue of cultures that societies can navigate the complexities of the modern world while remaining grounded in their cultural roots.

The dialog of cultures, nevertheless, assumes the preservation of uniqueness, "cultural identity, thereby escaping isolation and then a more direct confrontation. It is the discovery and support of what unites people of different cultures, while also warding off unification for the benefit of any one civilization" (Stepaniants, 2013, p. 15). This principle needs to become the foundation for the cultural and humanitarian aspects of the concept of the New Silk Road.

The present paper is devoted to the study of the popular ethical principle of the Golden Rule, which embodies commonly shared moral norms in the history of humankind. The focus of attention lies on moral and normative actions in the traditions of various ethnic cultures, particularly in the traditions of the Kyrgyz people, representatives of a nomadic Central Asian civilization.

The Golden Rule is a formula of behavior that most fully embodies the specificity of the moral principles of a particular ethnic group. In this aspect, this rule has evoked our interest yet

again in connection with the justification of the special role of the subjunctive modality and negative manifestations in the moral behavior of modern people in recent years.

The way of life principles of an ethnos, formed by generations, develops its own rules of construction and understanding of moral norms. A specific action, deed, or behavior is perceived and viewed by different ethnic communities in their own way, the nature of feelings and attitudes about this phenomenon is different. "The value of ethno-ethical postulates lies in their singular character, however, it is part of the general (Golden Rule), the essence of which is the projection of a *particular* moral and ethical system of evaluations" (Alymkulov, 2018, p. 125). The singular is one in a multitude of things, i.e., the common. It reflects the similarity of aspects, the properties of the object, and the connection between systems. It is through this connection that the particular manifests itself.

2. Methods

The present study consists of a comparative analysis of the common in the ethical assessment of a person's behavior, actions, and deeds. The paper uses written sources of ancient cultural monuments (Confucius, 2014; Dhammapada, n.d.; Encyclopedia of Hadith, 2011; Old Testament, n.d.), as well as the works of famous authors on historical-philosophical, ethical, social, and ethnic issues (Apresian, 2013; Baldonado, 1996; Jeffrey, 2015; Radhakrishnan, 1956; Stepaniants, 2013). In addition to these sources, the study utilizes materials from previous publications (Alymkulov, 2018).

3. Results and discussion

The intellectual analysis of the singular, common, and particular in moral principles of different ethnic cultures reveals some common characteristic results. Such a commonality is seen in the so-called Golden Rule. R.G. Apresian (2013) states that "In slightly varying versions, the formula of the Golden Rule is found in almost all cultural and moral traditions" (p. 39). In Confucius' "Judgments and Conversations", this rule is expressed as follows: "Zigong asked, 'Is there a single word that can serve as the guide to conduct throughout life?' The Master said, 'It is perhaps the word *shu* (authors' note: *forgiveness, reciprocity, care for people, benevolence, compassion*). Do not impose on others what you yourself do not want others to impose on you" (Confucius, 2014, p. 157). In ancient Indian epic period philosophy, especially the socio-ethical ideas of the

Mahabharata, the search for happiness is the main issue. Everyone wants to enjoy pleasures and avoid suffering. The main goal of each person's actions is to perceive pleasures and sufferings with calmness and composure. The concept of dharma means upholding justice, which is the invariable condition of a virtuous life. It is the duty of every human being. The essence of this duty is the maxim "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others" (Radhakrishnan, 1956, p. 430).

The most ancient mention of the Golden Rule is in the "Teachings of the scribe Ahiqar". Ahiqar, who served in the court of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), admonishing his adopted nephew, said, "My son, what seems bad to you, you must not do also to your comrades". There is a similar judgment in the Old Testament, The Book of Tobit, where Tobit, the uncle of Ahiqar, instructs his son Tobias: "Be careful, my child, in all you do, well-disciplined in all your behaviour. Do to no one what you would not want done to you" (Old Testament. The Book of Tobit. Chapter 4, 15, p. 2). One of the sayings of the Buddha (VI-V centuries B.C.) states: "As he instructs others so should he himself act" (Dhammapada, Chapter 12, 159, p. 9).

In the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (13th in the collection of al-Bukhari), it is said: "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself" (Sahih Al-Bukhari. 2. The Book of Faith, Chapter 7). "Will not have faith", according to the generally accepted commentary coming from Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani, means that one's faith will not be perfect. Hence, behavior in the logic of the Golden Rule is regarded as one of the signs of a perfect Muslim. This hadith is unquestionable in its authenticity (it is found in Muslim's collection under number 45, as well as in other sources). It is also not repeated (exists only in one version). However, there are commentaries that allow us to conclude that this rule was understood in the spirit of the commandment of love. The reciprocity of relationships it prescribes was interpreted not as equalization, but as recognition of the same human dignity for others. This is confirmed by the following examples. Should the rule that up to one-third of an inheritance may be bequeathed to one of the heirs be adhered to if following it, because of the insignificance of the inheritance, would condemn to poverty the other heirs to whom two-thirds would remain? Answer: it should not, for it is said... If a man in business affairs unknowingly enters a relationship with someone who is bankrupt, and this fact has become known to you, should you warn him about it? Answer: You should, just as you would be warned by a man if you unknowingly set out on a journey with a traveler who intends to strangle you, for it is said... Should a teacher treat a student with patience and care as he would treat a son? The answer is: he

should, for it is said... In all these cases, the mentioned hadith is referred to as the general moral basis for proper decisions.

The simultaneous emergence of the Golden Rule in different cultures is explained by the typological similarity of the eras experienced by these cultures. It was the so-called "axial age" (K. Jaspers), when there was a humanistic breakthrough in history and universal norms of culture were formed. The essence of the spiritual upheaval that occurred at that time can be concisely labeled as the discovery of man. The discovery of man, to formulate it briefly, consists in establishing that along with the first physical nature, there is a second, socio-cultural nature to human beings. The two are fundamentally different from each other: the first nature of a human being does not depend on them, and the second nature does. The second nature of man – the world of customs, laws, and morals – depends on the way people build relations among themselves regarding the extent that these decisions depend on them, on their conscious will.

According to the logic of the Golden Rule, a person acts in a morally proper way when they act in line with their own desires, which could also be the desires of others. But how to know whether some desires of an individual can also be the desires of others, of those to whom the actions that fulfill the desire are directed? The Golden Rule offers a clear enough mechanism for this. If negatively worded, this mechanism is strict and transparent. The Golden Rule forbids a person to do to others what they do not want for themselves. It also prohibits a person from doing what they condemn (censure) in others. Such a double prohibition allows an individual to easily carry out moral selections of their actions. Even if it were possible to argue against the Golden Rule in its negative formulation with reference to anthropological deformations such as masochistic or sadistic practices, which is not obvious, this would not refute the validity of the rule, just as, for example, the appearance of two-headed and one-legged mutations does not refute the truth that humans normally have one head and two legs. A more complicated matter is the positive formulation. The behavioral attitudes of others are postulated in it as the initial basis for making a decision, rather than one's own desires and assessments. In this case, a mechanism of inter-imitation is proposed, the essence of which is to look at the situation through the eyes of others, those whom the forthcoming act concerns, and to get their approval for it.

Hence, the Golden Rule is the rule of reciprocity. This means that: a) a relationship between people is moral when they are interchangeable as subjects of individually responsible behavior; b) the culture of moral choice consists in the ability to put oneself in the place of another; c) one should perform such actions that can receive the approval of those to whom they are directed.

In previous publications, we asserted that the source of moral rules in traditional Kyrgyz culture is oral folk art. Common expressions, proverbs, sayings, and words of wisdom are verbal, regulative, and normative experiences. Perhaps, these data do not fully reveal the normative-ethical content of the *common*, but nevertheless, it is an attempt at normative-ethical reconstruction of the private. Further, the *particular* that characterizes the ethnic originality of morality is also conditioned by non-verbal communicative experience. These features are expressed in the form of act-gestures, as well as other ways of communication of not only individuals but also the ethnos. Considering the facets of the *particular*, let us provisionally distinguish the constructive moments of the ethnos' moral characteristic:

- stable mores and ideals;
- verbal word-concepts and non-verbal gestures reflecting an or deed (Alymkulov, 2018, p. 126).

The level of the outlined moral ideals and concepts allows them to become a toolkit, a categorical apparatus of moral evaluation, performing regulatory and normative functions. However, a single, isolated, and simultaneously diverse and changeable action or deed is not always amenable to objective moral evaluation. Analyzing the most stable mores, we turn to its historical prerequisites, the genesis of ethical thinking, and the process of its emergence and formation. Researchers of the past, considering social order, family and marriage relations, traditions, and mores, directly or indirectly touch upon the problems of morality and morals. For example, in oral folk art, there are many epithets, artistic images, and concepts, such as "bata" and "alkysh" – a blessing, benevolent farewell words (Akmataliev, 2015, p. 109). In addition to that, there are other types of folklore genres that contain elements of a philosophical outlook. Among these are "Sanat", "Nasyyat", and "Terme", which consist of popular expressions, proverbs, sayings, and wisdoms with normatively regulating elements of empirical ethics. "Terme", in a poetic improvised form, performs value selection and classifies and qualitatively analyzes human behavior and the phenomena of nature and society. In this genre, with due regard to place and time and adjustment to social and life circumstances, in a selective manner, the improvising akyn brings folk wisdom to people's consciousness, while the listener compares it, draws certain conclusions, and uses it in his life. It is in this form that oral folk art shapes moral and ethical norms and ideals, distinctive traditions, and spiritual riches of the people. Moral and ethical regulators in folklore come in the form of figurative expressions, proverbs, and sayings, which fulfill the normative function. Furthermore, it should be noted that maxims and proverbs contain elements of the Golden Rule formula. Although folklore does not lend itself to

historical and chronological delineation, we still have material to validate the source of morality in order to reconstruct the system of values. Thus, the presented forms of folklore genre are subdivided into many concepts of a social and anthropological nature. In them, the highest moral value and moral ideals are humanism and patriotism (Alymkulov, 2018, p. 127).

The verbal and non-verbal components of moral rules include word notions that reflect generally accepted resolutions called "Kesim" (19th century). In it, all decisions are enshrined verbally in the form of *ant* (oaths), *shert* (obligations), *kesim* (sentences), and *ubada* (promises) (Kochkunov, 2013, p. 25). Verbal oath-taking took place as rituals and worship of the "blue sky" and "ancestral spirits". "Oath assurances between two people were sealed by baring sabers, cutting a stick in half, cutting the little finger to let out blood, etc., which were concluded by obligatory propitiatory sacrifices" (Kochkunov, 2013, p. 26). The oaths administered and established by such a system had underlying moral substance and were sealed based on the word "namys" (honor). The honor of a clan or tribe, according to the researchers of this category, is not "a form of exploitation of kin for the wealthy part of the population to achieve self-serving goals", but a separate concept with a profound meaning (Kochkunov, 2013, p. 28). Based on the records of Mulla Asan, the second half of the 19th century, N.K. Grodekov (1889) notes:

Manap is a rank in the lineage of the Russian prince. Not a single manap came from the house of Genghis Khan. Manaps were those people who stood out among the people (*yurtan ozyb*), were distinguished by bravery and generosity, and led the people in the time of beginninglessness. In times of enemy invasions, those who were distinguished among other manapas (*uzi uzyb chykkán*) gathered all the people and led them (*el bashlagan*). They were not chosen; but if they had been chosen, they would have been. (p. 6).

It follows from this that everyone, adhering to honor, could raise their status and stand out. Yet at the same time, honor and honesty were also evaluated as follows: "If a lowly man accidentally sits among the superior ones, he may be sent away, or left there, depending on whether he and his father are considered good people or not" (Gordekov, 1889, p. 10). The Golden Rule is also present in other aspects of human life. The cited references from the everyday life of a traditional culture society are yet to be studied for a long while. Within the framework of this work, we highlighted certain constructive points of its moral peculiarities (Alymkulov, 2018, p. 127).

4. Conclusion

To conclude our brief analysis of the genesis of the Golden Rule of morality and a review of its first historical evidence, we should note that the term itself emerged relatively late, in the 16th century, and was assigned to this rule by the end of the 18th century in English- and German-language literature. Before that, the rule was referred to in various ways, specifically a "short saying", "commandment", "basic principle", or "proverb".

The core idea of the Golden Rule is that everyone ought to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. Yet when applying this principle to specific situations, it may be necessary to take due account of the situation and the actors involved. For instance, what may be right for one culture or religion may not be so for others. Therefore, applying the Golden Rule demands the ability to consider the context and details of each case. Individual needs and characteristics of people must be recognized to make a decision that is best for everyone involved. The Golden Rule is a general principle that can be adhered to in any situation but it requires flexibility and the ability to make adjustments to suit each situation to achieve the best outcome.

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