

Hillel and Confucius: The Proscriptive Formulation of the Golden Rule in the Jewish and Chinese Confucian Ethical Traditions

Robert Elliott Allinson

A prospective convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah *while standing on one foot*. Hillel replied, “What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is *the whole of Torah* and the remainder is but commentary. Go and study it.” (Hillel: *Shab.* 31; emphasis added)

Zigong 子貢 asked: “Is there a *single word* that can serve as a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?” Confucius said: “Perhaps the word ‘shu’, ‘reciprocity’: ‘Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.’” (*Analects.* 15.24; see also *Analects.* 12 and *Zhongyong.* 13.3; emphasis added)¹

In the Chinese tradition the dominant tendency in the past eighteen centuries of commentary has attempted to show that the proscriptive version of the Golden Rule is no different in meaning than the prescriptive ver-

* Professor of Philosophy, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong. E-mail: re_allinson@hotmail.com.

Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy December 2003, Vol. III, No.1, pp. 29-41.
© 2003 by Global Scholarly Publications.

¹ When asked what is *ren* (仁 (humanity)), on one occasion Confucius said, “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (*Analects.* 12.2). Since *ren* is arguably the most important ethical notion of Confucius and the above statement is considered to be a formulation of *ren*, then this statement of the Golden Rule can also be taken as the most important ethical principle of Confucius. *Analects.* 15.24 is of special interest because Confucius, when asked for a single word, chose *shu* 恕 rather than even *ren*. Perhaps this is because *shu* is the procedural rule whereby we can become *ren* and thus of the two notions the one we need the most. It is important to note here that the words are attributed to Confucius himself. See also *Analects.* 6.30 where *shu* is defined as an analogy to take what is near at hand as the method of *ren*. To see how a similar argument can be constructed (*Analects.* 15:3), see Allinson 1991: 300-301.

sion and hence is equivalent in value.² This tradition has developed presumably out of a fear that the proscriptive version, if taken as different than the prescriptive version, will be perceived as inferior to the prescriptive version. Indeed, the proscriptive version has sometimes been labeled the Silver Rule as opposed to the Golden Rule, thus calling attention to its allegedly inferior status.

In the Jewish tradition, viewpoints have been more diverse. Hillel's interpretation has been interpreted as a defense of the survival instinct. Rabbi Munk argues that in a matter of life and death, the survival instinct will cause each individual to think first to save himself. Thus, nature argues against extending love of others beyond the negative definition. Even R' Akiva, who considers love of others as the fundamental principle of Torah teaching, acknowledges this limitation: "When there is a risk of death and one of two people can be saved, your life comes before the life of another." It is not clear to me that in all situations one would choose oneself first, and in any case as Rabbi Munk himself argues, the proscriptive formulation does not circumscribe the limits of the Golden Rule. He writes that Rambam argues that the Jewish viewpoint of love for one's fellow man "cannot be limited to the 'negative' ethic: since it includes the vast expanses of acts such as visiting the sick, consoling the afflicted, extending hospitality, protecting orphans and widows, reconciling enemies, and so on" (Munk: 220-222). Sometimes, the interpretation is given that it is because it is unrealistic for a man to love his neighbor as himself that man is told not to mistreat others as he would not want others to mistreat him. Sometimes it is said that Hillel is watering down the thought so as to make it understandable to a non-Jew (see Sforzo: 513). This interpretation makes Hillel out to be patronizing the potential convert and thus guilty of arrogance. Ahad H-'Am presents an interesting defense of the proscriptive formulation of the Golden Rule in terms of its preserving the objective status of morality. In his account, the prescriptive formulation bases morality on a subjective understanding (what is good for me) and thus undermines the objective nature of morality (what is good in itself) (see H-'Am: 128).

² Wing-tsit Chan "defends" the Confucian tradition against the Western charge that the Confucian doctrine of the Golden Rule is negative: "Commentators on the *Analects* in the last eighteen centuries have never understood the Golden Rule to be negative. In his *Lunyu Zhenyi* (*Correct Meaning of the Analects*) for example, LIU Baonan (1791-1895) made this comment: 'Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you. Then by necessity we must do to others what we want them to do to us'" (Chan 1955: 300; conversion to *hanyu pinyin* made). While Chan is correct in his view that the Confucian doctrine of the Golden Rule is not negative in value, he too quickly reduces the proscriptive formulation to the prescriptive formulation in favorably quoting from LIU Baonan 劉寶楠 in this respect. This *reductio* has the effect of eradicating any possible differences in the two formulations. For further discussion of how the Confucian formulation, while proscriptive, does not differ from the prescriptive formulation, see Chan 1969: 6-7; Creel 1951: 142; 1960: 131-2. For a similar discussion reducing the proscriptive formulation to the prescriptive formulation in Western thought, see King 1928: 270.

In earlier papers, I have argued that the proscriptively formulated version of the Golden Rule in the Chinese Confucian tradition is not a matter of linguistic happenstance and was specifically so formulated because it was superior to the prescriptively formulated version (Allinson 1985: 305-15; 1982: 223-231; 1988b: 734-38; 1988a: 92-97). Marcus Singer, a philosopher of ethics, has argued that "there is undoubtedly a difference in emphasis between these two statements of the Golden Rule, and therefore a rhetorical and psychological difference, but there is no logical or moral difference" (Singer: 304). If this is so, I would argue that the difference in rhetoric and emphasis is substantial and merits inquiry into what consequences might be entailed in the ethical attitudes held by both traditions. Both the Jewish religion and Chinese philosophy are known for the attention paid to and the sophistication of their ethical traditions. If in both of these traditions, a proscriptive linguistic form has been chosen in key instances to formulate what is referred to in both instances as the core ethical principle or the fundamental teaching, it behooves us to inquire as to what may be behind such a choice of semantic frames. Why would one wish to create a rhetorical difference and a difference in emphasis? What difference is created by a rhetorical difference? What is being emphasized in a difference in emphasis? Is it possible that a moral difference does lurk in the background?

In both the case of Confucius and that of Hillel, they are compelled to be especially concise while remaining precise. The prospective convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while he was standing on one foot. In Confucius' case, he was asked for a single word. Such were the ancient world's counterpart of the contemporary demand for being taught in a sound bite. Attention span was no better then than it is now. Hillel could have chosen the prescriptive formulation, "Love your Fellow Man as Yourself": it is more concise. However, it would not have been precise or fundamental enough. Confucius could have chosen benevolence, but he did not. The basic thesis of this paper is that the proscriptive version has been chosen because it most effectively represents the fundamental understanding of ethics and that other understandings of ethical action are derivatives of this understanding. I use the term "proscriptive" instead of "negative" because despite the fact that the term "negative" refers to the formulation and not the value, it is too easily confused with the value (pejorative). Likewise, I use the term "prescriptive" rather than "positive" or "affirmative" since the terms "positive" and "affirmative" are too easily taken to stand for the value implied (honorific) and not the formulation. Prescriptive formulations can be found as well in the Jewish and the Confucian traditions. Yet what is of importance is that the formulations of both Hillel and Confucius are proscriptive when they are asked to state the essence of Torah and his teachings (respectively) *in the shortest compass*

possible.³

In order to carry out this inquiry in a reasonable space, I have decided to classify my inquiry into four potential differences in the meaning of the proscriptive and the prescriptive semantic formulations, some of which will overlap. In the end, I believe that they show that the Jewish and Chinese traditions have in common the values of humility, realism, and practicality.

I. The proscriptive formulation suggests that it is easier to know what is harmful than it is to know what is beneficial and thereby cultivates or arises from a greater sense of humility and a practical sense of what is more easily understood and acted upon

It is well known in many traditions that it is much easier to paint a picture of Hell than it is to paint a picture of Heaven. What this seems to reflect is that it is not difficult to know what is bad for us, but it is indeed very difficult to define precisely what is good for us. The Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore wrote a famous book on ethics, *Principia Ethica*, maintaining that “good” was indefinable. Confucius, too, was very reluctant to discuss what the good is.⁴

Let us take the example of pain. Pain is something which all of us would wish to avoid, especially if it is for no good reason. It is very easy to discern that pain, especially unnecessary pain, is something bad. However, it is not so easy to say precisely what it is that is good. For example, if we eliminate the pain of hunger by eating, then when we no longer suffer hunger pains we have accomplished our mission. Yet it is much more difficult to decide, assuming we have a choice, what foods to eat. There is indeed disagreement about what foods are good for us to eat and what foods are not good for us to eat. Should we be vegetarians or meat eaters, for example? The decision then to formulate the most central principle of ethics in the Jewish and the Chinese Confucian traditions in proscriptive semantics can be said to have an epistemological motive. Out of an attitude of humility, of not knowing what the good is, it makes sense to focus one’s ethical attention on preventing harm. We all do know what is harmful. Why not focus ethical attention on what we know to be harmful and to thereby remove that which is harmful? From this standpoint, it can be said that the proscriptive formulation of the Golden Rule is consonant

³In the Jewish tradition one can note “Be considerate of your companion as of yourself” (*Apocrypha, Ben Sira*, 31.15); “Love the Lord through life, and one another with a true heart” (*Apocrypha, Patriarchs, Dan*, 5.3); “Seek for your neighbor what you would seek for yourself” (*Hasdai, Sefer HaTapuah*). One can also note other proscriptive formulations as well such as “What you yourself hate, do to no man” (*Apocrypha, Tobit*, 4.14). In Confucius, one can note *Analects* 6.4.30; 17.4; 10.17; 10.22; 12.16; 9.25; and 12.22, ‘Love your fellow men.’

⁴When asked what the good is, Confucius never gave a precise or a comprehensive definition (*Analects*: 9; see also 2.17; 7.16,19; 17.17; 18.8).

with the attitude of humility, an attitude which is to be found in both the Chinese and the Jewish traditions. In the Chinese tradition, the attitude of humility is well known. Confucius' *Analects* abounds in statements reflecting humility, most famously, "In a hamlet of ten households, there are bound to be those who are my equal in doing their best for others and in being trustworthy in what they say, but they are unlikely to be as eager to learn as I am" (*Analects*: 28);⁵ and, "Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I correct in myself" (*Analects*: 7.22). In the Jewish tradition, humility or epistemological modesty is a virtue that is reflected in the statements, "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your G-d" (*Micah*: 6.8) and "Do you see a man who considers himself wise? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (*Proverbs*: 26.12) and the saying, "Arrogance is equivalent to all the other sins" (*Sukka*: 29b).

The moral difference, then, that could be said to be contained in the proscriptive formulation of the Golden Rule, is that it shows a greater humility. One might not hesitate in recommending what is good for others if one is certain about what is good for oneself. If one lacks a complete and certain knowledge of what the good is, this would imply that one would not possess the qualifications to judge what is good for others.⁶ Contrariwise, the prescriptive formulation would seem to imply both epistemological immodesty and moral *hubris*. Since you know what the good is (how others should act towards you), there is no lack of knowledge here. Since what is good for you is also good for others, this would imply epistemological immodesty in that you were confident in extending the knowledge that pertained to yourself to others. It would also seem to imply moral *hubris* since you felt no moral qualms in the extension of what was good for you to others. However, we shall have to say more about this later on.

Hillel's formulation is a *midrash* of *Leviticus* 19.18, "Love thy neighbor as yourself." Hillel must have considered that the proscriptive formulation was pedagogically superior to the original. Confucius too, when asked what is humanity or benevolence, explained this by saying "what you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do that to others" (*Analects*: 12.2). A possible basis of this pedagogical superiority is that the commandment to not cause or allow pain or suffering is a clearer directive to action and a more effective stimulus to ethical action than a commandment to act out

⁵ The *Analects* is filled with statements affirming Confucius' love for learning, thus reflecting that he does not already know (2.4; 3.15; 4.17; 5. 9, 15; 7.2, 17, 20, 22, 28; 9.8; 19.5, 6, 7; see Allinson 1985: 305-15).

⁶ According to Chan, when Confucius was asked about *ren*, he gave some six different answers, each according to the pupil's temperament, capability, or environment. In so doing, Confucius seemed to display an awareness of the pluralism of the good. What is good for one may not be good for others (*Analects*: 12.1, 2,3, 22; 15.9; 17.6).

of positive feeling. For example, when a little boy pulls his younger sister's hair, the parent may pull the boy's hair so that he feels the pain and then say, "you do not like this done to yourself, and so do not do this to your sister." The little boy must first feel his pain before he knows that this is what he is causing his sister to experience. It is easier for the little boy to understand what ethical action is by drawing his attention to what he should not do than it is by drawing his attention to what he should do, as in commanding him to act lovingly towards his younger sister. In fact, this explication of the Golden Rule is similar to that of Maimonides. In his explication of 19.18, he stated, "Just like a person who is liable to the death penalty would choose the easier type of death with the least amount of suffering, so, too, should we apply [this principle] to others" (Maimonides: 7; mishnah: 2). Love is explained through the example of inflicting less pain or if you like by not doing or in this case by doing less harm.

The Chinese philosopher, WANG Yangming 王陽明 explicated the concept of reciprocity in almost the same way by utilizing the example of what one did not want done to oneself as a means to measure how one should acquire humanity, that is, how one should act towards others: "What men do to me that I do not wish, I do not do to them. ... Reciprocity, the method of acquiring humanity, is precisely our business" (Wang: 17). The passage in *Deuteronomy* also points out: "Remember that you were a slave" (*Deuteronomy*: 5.14-15). The implication here is, just as you would not want to be treated as a slave, do not enslave others.

It does seem that it is easier to know what is harmful than it is to know what is beneficial and that the method is to take what one does not like done to oneself as a measure of what not to do to others. Therefore, the proscriptive formulation arises from a greater sense of humility and a greater practical sense of what is more easily understood and acted upon.

II. The proscriptive formulation suggests that an emphasis is being placed on preventing the consequences of unintended harmful behavior in addition to encouraging the practice of good behavior

Let us examine the consequences of applying the proscriptive or the prescriptive formulations of the Golden Rule. Suppose I come across a starving fellow human being. If I am a meat eater, and I apply the prescriptive version of the Golden Rule, I may feed this needy person with meat dishes. For, since I would appreciate being given meat if I were starving, so I should act onto others. The danger here is that I may commit an ethical harm if my starving other is a vegetarian and I could just as easily have offered this fellow human being a vegetarian dish. The proscriptively formulated version of the Golden Rule avoids this problem. It does not provide me with a rule that allows me to act towards others as I would wish to be treated; it only prohibits me from acting in ways in which I

would not wish to be treated. Thus, if I were a starving vegetarian, I would not wish to be given meat as an alternative to vegetables and hence would not offer my starving vegetarian a meat dish. I may avoid ethically harming this starving individual by finding vegetables with which to feed this person. The proscriptively formulated version of the Golden Rule thus seems to possess a moral advantage of preventing possible moral harm doing. Another example is illustrated by the case of the masochist. If I desire that others harm me, then I will attempt to harm others in turn. While this may seem to be an extreme example, it does illustrate the principle that I may choose something harmful for myself and then, thinking it is good for me, on the principle that what is good for me is also good for others, extend it to others (see Weiss: 421-31).⁷

The suggestion is that the consequence (whether intentional or unintentional) of framing the Golden Rule in a proscriptive sentential form is that moral harm doing may be avoided. This suggests that the proscriptive formulation may possess an advantage of not only encouraging good behavior but also of acting as a preventative to unintended harmful behavior.

Singer argues that such consequences are avoided by not taking the prescriptive version of the Golden Rule literally, as in “Do unto others *what* you would have them do unto you,” but to interpret it more liberally, as in “Do unto others *as* you would have them do unto you” (Weiss: 299), meaning that just as he would that others take account of his interests and wishes even though they may differ from theirs, then he should take account of the interests and wishes of others in his treatment of them (Weiss: 300). However, Singer’s version does not really escape the problem. Another’s wish may be to be abused. Another way to avoid problems with the prescriptive formulation is suggested by Rabbi Elie Munk. He remarks that “Ben Azzai pointed out that if it were only for the command to love our fellow man as we love ourselves, we might argue that if we have been insulted, let him be insulted. However, this would not relieve us of the obligation to avoid desecrating the likeness of G-d in Whose image our fellow man was created” (Munk: 220-221).

It is also of interest to take note that in his attempt to explain more fully what is meant by the prescriptive version of the Golden Rule, Singer explains it by reference to the proscriptive version of the Golden Rule, thus betraying the fact that the proscriptive version is more basic and in fact is needed in order to define the prescriptive version. In his words, “just as he [his example is of the person who enjoys hearing tom-toms in the middle of the night] would not want others to do things that are annoying to him—perhaps the blowing of reveille on a bugle after he has fallen asleep), then he ought not to do things that are manifestly annoying

⁷ Paul Weiss also argues that the application of the prescriptive formulation of the Golden Rule may entail harmful consequences, though his suggestions as how to overcome this do not include a discussion of the proscriptive formulation.

to them" (Singer: 300).

Does this mean that there is no value in encouraging the practice of good behavior? I do not think that this follows. Good behavior does follow from thinking out the consequences of following the proscriptive formulation. For example, if I do not wish to starve, then I will do my best to alleviate the hunger of others. Good actions can definitely be generated from the application of the proscriptive formulation. *Since I would never wish to be left to starve to death then I am morally obliged to save anyone and everyone from starving to death.*

It is straightforward that, when one knows what pain or suffering another is undergoing, one can take steps to alleviate that pain or suffering. It is straightforward to perform good acts when good acts are defined as the removal of suffering and pain, that is, when good acts are defined as arising from the desire to alleviate conditions that one should not allow to exist. There is no problem of generating good acts from the proscriptive formulation. In fact, even Singer, as we have seen above, derives his example of a good act from refraining from a hurtful action. Good acts follow logically from the prohibition of harmful behavior. On the other hand, there is a preventative to the possible commission of harmful acts which arise out of good intentions. Thus, the proscriptive formulation prevents harmful behavior as well as promoting good behavior.

III. The proscriptive formulation suggests a need to preserve the moral autonomy and moral choice of the individual

This third difference between the prescriptive and proscriptive versions of the Golden Rule may be said to be a corollary of the second difference. It has been seen above that one may pay less attention in applying the prescriptive formulation of the Golden Rule to the differences that exist between people. Here it may be said that the proscriptive version places a great value on the preservation of the moral autonomy and the moral choice of the individual. It may also show that a value is being placed on the toleration of behavior that is not morally harmful and hence may be consistent with an attitude of tolerance towards individual differences. After all, it is part of the Jewish tradition that the Jews do not possess a monopoly on places in Heaven and that the righteous of other traditions may also get an entrance ticket.

It is interesting in this regard to consider the current Jewish attitude which is opposed to proselytizing (see Prager: 91; Silver: 14-15; Cohen). It was not always so. According to Dennis Prager, in the ancient world, Jews vigorously sought converts whenever possible. In the ancient world, Jews were such active missionaries on behalf of Judaism that by the time of Jesus, 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish (at one point there were 8 million Jews in the Roman Empire). When Christianity became the Ro-

man state religion, the state immediately prohibited conversion to Judaism, and by 407 CE, it became a capital offense for a Christian to convert to Judaism.” Indigenous Chinese traditions such as Confucianism or Daoism also do not seem to proselytize. Whether or not there were Jewish missionaries in the past (individuals rather than paid professionals), it appears that a proscriptive formulation suggests that religious and moral choices need to be made by the individual in a framework of autonomy. I believe that this value of autonomy is itself based on two recognitions. Firstly, differences exist between individuals such that what is good for one may not be what is good for another. Secondly, there can be no right moral content if it is not accompanied with, nay, framed by, autonomous moral choice.

Can there be a moral content if it is not accompanied with, nay, framed by, autonomous moral choice? Is there a connection between the prescriptive sentential formulation of the Golden Rule and the attitude that I know best what is good for others? Is it possible that underlying the prescriptive sentential formulation is the idea that my moral and religious choices, my ultimate values, are exactly the ones that you should embrace? There is a danger, it seems, in the prescriptive version being so interpreted, consciously or unconsciously. The proscriptive version would appear to counsel against imposing one’s values on another. It may not prevent it. Yet it seems that the proscriptive formulation is consonant with a non-aggressive attitude toward finding converts. In this connection, Martin Goodman, a Reader in Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford, has commented, “a willingness to accept is quite different from a positive desire to acquire” (Goodman: 39). Abba Hillel Silver points out that “The Rabbis never accepted the principle of forcible conversion” (qtd. in Goodman: 39).

The deeper value that lies underneath this difference, this value of proselytizing versus this value of not proselytizing is, I think, well illustrated by the difference between the two sentential formulations. The proscriptively formulated sentential rendition would appear to lay a greater stress on the value of each individual finding her or his own moral way without being persuaded by the unsolicited attentions of another. It is interesting that the moral tradition of Judaism and the Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Daoism (and I could include here the Chinese version of Chan Buddhism as well) all seem to place a great value on the moral autonomy of the individual.

Why place such a great value on moral autonomy? Moral autonomy reflects, I think, the value that is placed on moral choice and moral growth. The story of the choice of Adam and Eve is a story of moral choice. In the *Analects* of Confucius it is always up to the individual to make a moral choice. When a superior man is faced with the prospect of profit versus rightness, he always *chooses* rightness (*Analects*: 14.12; 16.10; 4.10, 16; 17.23). However, rightness must be *chosen*. One cannot simply be

moral; one must choose to be moral.

So it is with all ultimate values. Even the choice to be a filial son or daughter is a choice that must be made by the moral individual (*Analects*: 2.5). It seems that it is in common with Jewish and Chinese traditions, as illustrated by the tradition of Confucianism, that the moral choice of the individual is of great importance. In Judaism this extends even to G-d. For in Judaism it is Abraham who argues with G-d over the potential destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to be more moral in His choices and thus to grow morally and indeed he even wins his argument except that G-d cannot find the number of good people that Abraham manages to whittle him down to. He wins the moral argument with G-d while he loses the empirical argument. Moral choice and moral growth are central to Confucianism and Judaism.⁸

The prescriptive formulation does seem to explicitly say that I know what is best for you. The proscriptive formulation of the Golden Rule does seem to imply that the choice of ultimate values must be a choice that comes from within—that comes from moral insight, from moral growth. When G-d decides that He can save the entire cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if fifty righteous people can be found and then in turn is moved to forty-five, then forty, then thirty, then twenty, and then ten, has not G-d been led to make a more and more moral choice? (*Braishis*: 18.23, 24). Has not G-d grown in this dialogue? After all, in the beginning G-d was planning to destroy the cities whether any number of righteous people lived in them or not!

The proscriptive formulation seems to imply that I do not know what is good for you. It is your moral responsibility in life to find this for yourself. Otherwise, what is your life about? When G-d asked Adam in the garden, "Where are you?" it was not because He did not know. It was because He wanted Adam to be aware of where (in his moral choice making) he was (*Braishis*: 3.1-24). It is the moral choice of the individual that is paramount and it is this autonomy that can never be taken away from the individual or else what is the point of all morality? If one is aware of the proscriptive formulation and does not seek to reduce it to the prescriptive formulation, it would seem to protect the moral autonomy and the potential moral growth of the individual.

IV. The proscriptive formulation suggests that it is ethically more efficacious to prohibit behavior than it is to prescribe behavior

This fourth point is put forth as a suggestion and may be considered to be a moot point. It is a deeper consideration of what has already been sug-

⁸ For the continuing emphasis on moral growth in Confucianism, see Chu. The story of Job can also be interpreted as a testament to Job's moral choice (see Allinson 2002).

gested in the first point. It seems to be true of human behavior that human beings tend to be more affected by prohibitions of bad behavior than by counsels to good behavior. For example, if I am told to be honest, I may be honest and I may not be honest. Being told to be honest seems to be easily forgotten when the need to tell a lie becomes urgent. However, if I am told "Do Not Steal" the likelihood that this prohibition will be overcome when there is a temptation to steal is not nearly so great. It appears that psychologically speaking the human being is more governed by prohibitions than the human being is persuaded by counsels of goodness. This last point is put forth as food for thought; yet, it is interesting that both Judaism and Chinese tradition as exemplified by Confucianism have chosen to put their Golden Rule in a proscriptive or prohibitive sentential form. Both traditions seem to reflect that such a move may be more practical in promoting ethical behavior. It is interesting to note in this connection that of the 613 commandments in the Jewish tradition, 365 are framed in a proscriptive sentential form versus 248 which are framed in the prescriptive sentential form.

I would like to conclude by returning to Hillel. It needs to be recalled that Hillel's *midrash* is of a sentence that occurs near the end of a paragraph which includes other sentences. The commandment to love your neighbor forms part of the conclusion of the paragraph.⁹ What are the previous sentences to which this ending statement forms the concluding thoughts? It is first said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart" (*Leviticus*: 19.17). It is also said that "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge." It is only after these and like proscriptive prohibitions that it is finally said, "Love thy fellow man as yourself" (*ibid.*) Could it be that to command love without first removing hate, vengeance, and grudges would be ineffective? Does it make sense to command love without removing its impediments of hatred, vengefulness, and resentment? It is relatively easier to love one's neighbor for whom one feels no hatred, jealousy, resentment, or the desire that ill come to her or him. However, is this a typical set of circumstances when one is commanded to act ethically? If one judges by the context of the paragraph in *Leviticus*, it is precisely this neighbor that one is commanded to love. The command to love one's neighbor is a command given in context. "You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against your fellow man but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*ibid.*) If one already is jealous of, feels resentment towards, and hates one's neighbor, the commandment to love him may fall upon deaf ears. It is ethically more efficacious to overcome negative feelings first before one will be willing to take positive action. Thus, the couching of the Golden Rule in a proscriptive formulation may show an awareness of difficult circumstances in which one is called upon to be

⁹ An equivalent argument can be made if it is argued that the sentence belongs near the beginning of the paragraph.

ethical and how best to cope with these difficult circumstances.

Something else might also be emphasized here. It could very well be that the principal aim of this commandment, as of others, is the avoidance of unfounded hatred which destroys the life of society. It may show a wisdom in considering that the evils that grow from hatred are those that are most to be guarded against. One need only think back to the Holocaust and to present conditions in Israel to be aware of this. While no one would take exception to the mandates to visit the sick and console the afflicted, it is of greater moral urgency to avoid unfounded hatred. The "Do Not's" include the most major crimes, those of murder, robbery, cruelty, and adultery (*Genesis*: 6.12, 13; 9.5; 20.3; 39.9; *Amos*: 1.3). Perhaps it is the case that the proscriptive formulation of the Golden Rule simply means that there must be a prioritization of ethical values.

I have ventured to show a commonality between Jewish and Chinese traditions by focusing on the nature of the central ethical principle in both traditions to be formulated as a prohibition. I have suggested that such a formulation shows that there are four ethical values which may be said to be held in common. Firstly, it is easier to know what is harmful than what is beneficial. This in turn reflects a greater humility in constructing an ethical principle (stick to what you know) and a greater practical sense of what is more easily understood and acted upon. Secondly, both traditions seem to emphasize preventing the consequences of unintended harmful behavior in addition to encouraging the practice of good behavior. This may in turn reflect an attitude that the greatest dangers that exist are those that are perpetrated by humans themselves and are those that are to be most guarded against (-isms that are to be imposed by human on human). Thirdly, the moral choice and the moral growth of the individual is precious to both traditions. Fourthly, in the end, more ethical behavior can be generated by prohibitions than by positive injunctions. This in turn may reflect the realism and the practicality that is common to both traditions. It is hoped that these reflections can stir our thought and enable us to consider how knowing the other's tradition can encourage us to more thoroughly reflect upon our own.

References

- Allinson, Robert E. 1982. "On the Negative Version of the Golden Rule as Formulated by Confucius." *New Asia Academic Bulletin* III: 223-231.
- _____. 1985. "The Confucian Golden Rule: A Negative Formulation." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 12: 305-315.
- _____. 1991. "The Ethics of Confucianism and Christianity: The Delicate Balance." In *Confucian-Christian Encounters in Historical and Contemporary Perspective, Religions in Dialogue*, Vol. 5, edited by Peter K. H. Lee. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.

- _____. 2002. *Space, Time and the Ethical Foundations*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate.
- _____. *Analects of Confucius, The*. Trans. by Arthur Waley. Vintage Books, 1989.
- Chan, Wing-tsit. 1955. "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of Ren." *Philosophy East & West* 4: 295-320.
- _____. 1969. *Neo-Confucianism, Etc*. Hong Kong: Oriental Publications.
- Cohen, Jeremy, ed. 1991. *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity from Late Antiquity to the Reformation*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Creel, H.G. 1951. *Confucius, the Man & the Myth*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.
- _____. 1960. *Confucius & the Chinese Way*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Chu, Hsi and LU Tsu-ch'ien (compilers). 1967. *Reflections on Things at Hand, The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, trans. by Wing-tsit Chan. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goodman, Martin. 1995. "Proselytising in Rabbinic Judaism." In *Readings on Conversion to Judaism*, edited by Lawrence J. Epstein. London and Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.
- H-'Am, Ahad. 1946. "Essays." In *Philosophia Judaica*, translated by Leon Simon. East and West Library.
- Hertz, J.H., ed. 1981. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. London: Soncino Press.
- King, George Brockwell. 1928. "The 'Negative' Golden Rule." *Journal of Religion* 8.
- Maimonides. 1981. *Commentary on Sanhedrin*, translated by Fred Rosner. New York: Sopher-Hermon Press, Inc.
- Munk, Rabbi Elie. 1992. *The Call of the Torah, An Anthology of the Interpretation and Commentary of the Five Books of Moses*, translated by E.S. Mazer, and edited by Yitzchok Kirzner. New York: Mesorah Publications.
- Prager, Dennis. 1995. "Judaism Must Seek Converts." In *Readings on Conversion to Judaism*, edited by Lawrence J. Epstein. London and Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.
- Silver, Abba Hillel. 1956. *Where Judaism Differed: An Inquiry into the Distinctiveness of Judaism*. New York: The Macmillan Co.
- Singer, Marcus. 1963. "The Golden Rule." *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 38: 293-314.
- Sforno, Obadiah ben Jacob. 1993. *Commentary on the Torah*, translated by Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz. Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications.
- Wang, Yang-Ming. 1972. *The Philosophical Letters of Wang Yang-ming*, translated by Julia Ching. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina.
- Weiss, Paul. 1941. "The Golden Rule." *Journal of Philosophy* 38: 421-431.
- Zhong Yong (the Doctrine of the Mean). In *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. by Wing-tsit Chan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.