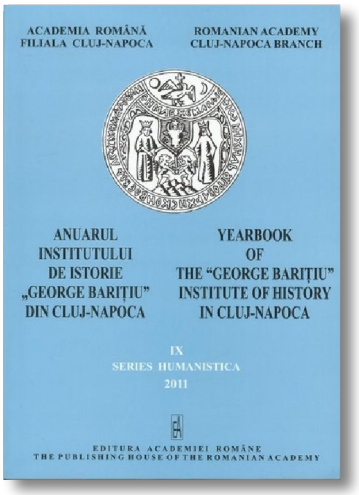

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THE GOLDEN RULE IN APPLIED ETHICS: HOW TO MAKE RIGHT DECISIONS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract. *"Treat others as you want to be treated" is one of the most familiar formulations of the Golden Rule. In this article, seven different expressions are described that can all be seen as varieties of the same rule. The Golden Rule can be a very useful instrument for Applied Ethics in both theoretical and practical moral thinking. However, none of these variations gives a definite moral advice. The reason is that the Golden Rule does not contain any reference to value standards. It rather serves as a rule of reversibility and consistency that tells us that we should act upon others as we would like to be treated by them, i.e. the Golden Rule asks for a harmony between our moral actions and our desires. This Principle of Reciprocity may lead to a number of misconceptions, but several examples serve to gain a morally acceptable understanding of this universal moral code.*

Key words: *golden rule, ethics of reciprocity, principle of consistency, principle of love, silver rule, platinum rule*.

The financial and economic crisis of the last years developed into a global disaster with numerous causes and unforeseeable consequences[1]. Among the many reasons and causes that have been suggested or identified was the failure of the academic experts to warn the public and the governments about the instability and the limitations of the economic models that prevail nearly all research efforts[2]. Beyond this failure, however, it should not be overlooked that these specialists "have an ethical responsibility to communicate the limitations of the models and the potential misuse of their research"[3]. In addition to this

[1] See the *Dossier on the financial and economic crisis* (University of St. Gallen 2009); another summary can be found in *Financial crisis of 2007–2010* (2010) that offers a list of 12 causes and explanatory attempts; particularly clear is the analysis *Financial and world economic crisis: What did economists contribute?* by Friedrich Schneider and Gebhard Kirchgässner, *Financial and World Economic Crisis: What did Economists Contribute?*, 2009.

[2] Friedrich Schneider and Gebhard Kirchgässner, 2009: 323

[3] Colander *et al.* 2009: 4; quoted in Friedrich Schneider and Gebhard Kirchgässner, 2009: 223.

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responsibility, "the rational expectations model has made economists blind to the role of interactions (e.g., trust!) between actors"[4]. This is – among other hints to the lack of moral attitudes in the world of business – an important indication that moral decisions have to be based on ethical principles that convey a reliable, clear and tested message. A well-known directive that fulfills these criteria is the Golden Rule. In one of its most familiar formulations it says, "Treat others as you want to be treated". Today it is considered to be just one option of several ways to rational ethics[5]. In this article, the Golden Rule or the Ethics of Reciprocity is described and discussed in various formulations. As it is by far the best known and probably least understood ethical device, it will be argued that if properly understood it is one of the most efficient directives for moral responsibility. It will become clear that this principle would have helped to minimize the broad economic and moral damage of the present crisis if considered in due measure. The Golden Rule is a solid basis for a responsible applied ethics in both theory and practice.

1. **TRADITIONAL VERSIONS OF THE GOLDEN RULE**

In ethics, we normally distinguish between a positive and a negative formulation of the Golden Rule.

[1] *The Golden Rule positively expressed*

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."[6]

This command seems fundamental, because it contains "the Law and the Prophets". In other words, to know this rule of behavior and act accordingly assures the moral rightness of our actions.

A standard objection against this positive version of the Golden Rule is that people may have strange, if not abnormal desires. A masochist, for example, could wish to harm others, because he would like to be hurt or violated by others in some way. To escape this problem, we either choose a more explicit formulation like [6] below or take into consideration the context out of which [1] has been quoted: the Bible (see below [7]).

[2] *The Golden Rule negatively expressed*

"One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself."[7]

[4] Friedrich Schneider and Gebhard Kirchgässner, 2009: 224.

[5] See Ulrich 2008: 44–48, "The Golden Rule and the Judaeo-Christian commandment to love one's neighbour". The Golden Rule is also shared by many religious and secular moral viewpoints: see *Religious tolerance:* http://www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc.htm – For a broad historical, psychological and religious view see Wattles 1996.

[6] The Bible: Luke 6:3, can also be expressed as "Treat others just as you want to be treated"; or: The Bible: Matthew 7:12: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Sometimes it is easier and clearer to say what we ought not to do instead of listing all advisable and morally right acts. This didactic device is also used in most of the Ten Commandments.

If you take [2] as the *only directive* of your moral point of view, it would be morally right to not behave towards others at all. Although it is questionable whether or not such a behavior is possible at all, the idea is that a person that lives in an isolated place with nobody around would not be able to violate this version of the Golden Rule. – Also, it is not difficult to think of acts that are disagreeable to me, but not to others like playing loud pop music to the youngsters in my family: they like it, but I don't. Or: I disagree with giving them large sums as pocket money, but they would consider me "generous". Here it becomes obvious already that the Golden Rule as an isolated rule cannot serve as specific moral advice but rather offers some formal directive.

Three more rules can be seen as constituents within the Golden Rule. In his painstaking study on the Golden Rule, Hans Reiner identifies three different rules that are to be distinguished as they suggest different kinds of how to understand them and act accordingly[8]. In the following paragraphs [3], [4] and [5], I summarize Reiner's analysis of these constituents of the Golden Rule.

[3] *The Rule of Empathy*

This constituent of the Golden Rule requires us to consider our own willing with respect to our experiences and sufferings: this willing should be taken as the measure for our own behavior: "Do to others what you yourself would like to experience", or: "Don't do to others what you would dislike to suffer". By imaginatively putting myself into the place of the other person my own willing becomes the measure of how to treat them. Thus the Rule of Empathy has its selfish overtones. It does not tell us what we morally ought to do or what is morally right, because it is the willing based on my feeling that expresses the meaning of the rule. This is one essential constituent of the Golden Rule. It rests yet on another pillar that has to be taken into account.

[4] *The Rule of Autonomy*

This constituent of the Golden Rule says: "Treat others according to your judgment of their behavior as morally right" and "Don't treat others according to your judgment of their behavior as morally wrong". This form of behavior focuses on an act of my will different from the one discussed in [3]. Instead of considering

[7] Mahabharata, *Anusasana Parva*, 113.8, and then it says: "This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire", taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic_of_reciprocity; similar the expression from China: "What you do not wish upon yourself, extend not to others", ibid. – This negative version is sometimes called "the Silver Rule": http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver_Rule

[8] Reiner 1974: 353 ff. where the author not only explains different rules implied by the Golden Rule, but also traces them back to their historical and literary roots.

my own experience or feeling, I rather look at the behavior of the other person. Then my moral evaluation of this behavior becomes the measure for my own acting. This attitude presupposes some knowledge of good and evil that we tend to recognize more easily and faster in the behavior of others than in our own. It is the behavior of others that we identify as morally correct as well as binding for ourselves. On the other hand, we may discern their behavior as morally wicked and thus as to be shunned[9]. In morally judging the behavior of others we are free and morally autonomous persons.

Connecting the Rule of Empathy and the Rule of Autonomy results in

[5] *The Rule of Reciprocity* (RR)

The Rule of Empathy can be understood in a slightly different way when my own willing is not motivated by selfish reasons but rests on typically moral grounds. I accept the behavior of others towards me not only for selfish reasons, but also because of motives that are morally right in themselves. Such a rule comes close to the Rule of Autonomy; both of them are combined in the *Rule of Mutuality* or *Rule of Reciprocity* whose most familiar versions are:

[5a] "Do unto others what you would do to you if you were in their place"

and

[5b] "Don't do unto others what you wouldn't do to you if you were in their place"

In either form, this rule goes beyond the Rule of Empathy, as it emphasizes mutual helpfulness and consideration for others.

The formulations described so far rest on certain presuppositions. [3] assumes as basic "values" something like "*x* is good $=_{df}$ I like *x*" and "*x* is wrong $=_{df}$ I dislike *x*". *x* stands for a certain act, behavior, thought or intention. The Rule of Autonomy [4], however, presupposes for my judgment some knowledge of a moral standard originating probably from conscience, education, or both. Since no specific or even justified moral values are spelled out in the Golden Rule, also [5] is open to criticism or to further refinement. I find the following suggestion of Harry Gensler's thought provoking book *Formal Ethics*[10] an important step forward in this discussion by showing that, strictly speaking, the Golden Rule expresses the requirement to be consistent in one's behavior:

[6] *The Rule of Consistency*

The Golden Rule does not tell us what we ought to do in a specific situation. It does not say, "Be nice to your clients" or "Treat your neighbors friendly" or

[9] This Rule of Autonomy resembles Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, but Reiner 1974: 364 points out that these two are not the same. Whereas the Rule of Autonomy considers a single case of behavior only, Kant's Imperative requires me to find out if I can will the underlying hypothetical imperative (the 'maxim' of my act) to become a universal law.

[10] Cf. Gensler 1996, chapter 5, where a number of interesting specifications of the Golden Rule are discussed.

"Whoever is aggressive to you, react peacefully". It rather is a consistency principle saying that our actions should be in harmony with our desires, even if we are in the place of the other person. Gensler's formulation: "Don't have your actions out of harmony with your desires (toward a reversed situation action)"[11]. If it is your wish or desire to be greeted politely by others, greet them politely in the first place. If you want your mistakes and errors to be forgiven by your partner, friend or work fellow, forget the mistakes and errors they may have committed against you. In other words: Each situation that requires a moral act asks for a moral decision first. For that decision you should imagine yourself to be a conscientious and impartial observer of the situation. The act A that the acting person, say P_1, wants to do in situation $S_{t,p,c}$ to the other person P_2, should be done if A is morally acceptable to P_1 and if a comparable act A would be committed in a comparable situation $S_{t,p,c}$ by P_2 to P_1. The situation is described by using t as time index, p as place index and c as index for the relevant circumstances of the situation. Thus, what this version of the Golden Rule suggests is that we are required to take on the role of an impartial and conscientious judge whenever we make a moral decision[12].

[7] "Love your neighbor as yourself"

This injunction is the Biblical understanding of the Golden Rule[13]. The equation, [7] = the Golden Rule, can be found elsewhere[14]. At first sight, it seems doubtful if [7] can help us understanding the Golden Rule better or deeper, because it has often been criticized and misunderstood[15]. Taken out of its Biblical context, [7] sounds like a great moral rule and therefore acceptable in many cultures and religions. Yet it is incomplete without the 'other' component of the *Principle of Love*. Thus the question can be raised, *why* we should love other fellow human beings or, put in terms of the *Ethic of Reciprocity*, *why* we should treat others as we want to be treated? The answer is because the Principle of Love consists of two

[11] Gensler 1996: 93: "Don't combine (1) acting to do A to X with (2) not consenting to the idea of A being done to you in an exactly similar situation."

[12] Gensler 1996: 95 lists four conditions to elucidate this notion of the Rule of Consistency: "(i) act to do A to X; (ii) believe that it would be all right for you to do A to X; (iii) believe that in an exactly similar situation it would be all right for A to be done to you; (iv) consent to the idea of A being done to you in an exactly similar situation". – (ii) reminds me of the Rule of Empathy but does not tell me for what reasons the agent should believe in the rightness of A. (iii) refers to "an exactly similar situation" which is not a notion easy to describe; also it is not said to which situation this situation in (iii) should be similar.

[13] The Bible: Leviticus 19:18: "I am the LORD, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself." Also Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:27.

[14] E.g. in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic_of_reciprocity. This equation is justified in the Bible itself: all moral directives follow from the two commandments of love and all culminate in "Do unto others …" (see footnote 6).

[15] E.g. Hanfling 1993 who raises three difficulties with it: the scope of "my neighbor", the command to love others and the idea of loving oneself.

rules or two commands: "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."[16] Thus, from the Biblical point of view, the religious dimension is a necessary condition for the understanding of the Golden Rule. "Loving God" is certainly a sufficient reason for "loving one's neighbor" because in the context of the Bible, God has loved us humans first and is – as Father – still loving us. Since through His creation, all humans are God's children and are loved by Him, they are invited to love Him and each other like Him. From this view results the Golden Rule or the Ethics of Reciprocity as a supreme moral standard that contains all other moral rules.[17] Yet it may be unclear, to what extent the Golden Rule can be shown to be morally and rationally valid *without* religious assumptions.

2. SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF AND CONFUSIONS ABOUT THE GOLDEN RULE

- *The Golden Rule is not a law of revenge*

Although the Rule of Reciprocity is the central message of the Golden Rule, criticism can be raised against it. It is important to note what it is not. The Golden Rule is not a directive of revenge or a law of retaliation, e.g., "Since you have been cruel to me, have hurt me or have lied to me, I will do the same things to you." This is not compatible with [5b], yet its counterpart [5a] is: "Since you have helped me in that difficult situation, have borrowed me money or have taken care of my children when I was ill, I will do the same to you (in case you need it)." These examples of "positive" retaliation are widely accepted, hence considered morally right. The underlying principle, however, is still problematic: "Because you did act A to me, I will do act A to you in a comparable situation." This is of course not a moral rule, but rather an argument. But the argument rests on the idea of reversibility which is questionable and even morally objectionable with value qualifications be they positive or negative.

- *The Golden Rule is not a dictate of the desires of others*

Some authors like philosopher Karl Popper suggest an improvement of the Golden Rule by taking into account the desires of the other person: "The golden rule is a good standard which is further improved by doing unto others, wherever

[16] The Bible: Matthew 22:38–40; also Luke 10:27. In footnote 6, the very same words about "the Law and the Prophets" were said about the Golden Rule. So it is correct to assume the equivalence of the *complete* Love Principle with the Golden Rule + Christian presuppositions.

[17] It may be noted that most quotes of the Golden Rule are imbedded in some kind of religious background. Whether Confucian, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish or Christian thought, without their religious framework, the Golden Rule would not hold: see its different versions referred to in footnote 5.

possible, as they want to be done by."[18] Formulations [1] to [6] say that the agent should in some form or another take his/her wishes and desires as the measure for moral action in the place of the other. Suppose you go shopping, buy something and have to pay 12 Euros. You hand over to the salesperson a 20-Euro bill. Erroneously she returns 12 Euros to you. According to the Golden Rule, you should think first, "If I were in her place, I would like to see this customer being honest and paying back the surplus money". Following my deliberation, I give her 4 Euros back. But what actually is the "desire of the other person"? In most cases I don't know what other people think or want. And why should I do, what *they* want? What makes their desires better or morally more right than mine? Should parents and teachers treat their children and students in ways *they* would want to be treated? That could have drastic consequences, thus Popper's suggestion is not helpful.

- *The Golden Rule is not a dictate of the behavior of others*

Many people are uncertain both psychologically and morally. This uncertainty may be a temptation to behave in morally important situations like the majority of others behave in similar situations. Cheating in taxes, betraying one's spouse, ignoring the rights of one's fellow citizens and many more practices of this sort do not flow from any interpretation of the Golden Rule, but rather serve as an excuse by pointing to the fact that "everyone does it today". So, in these cases some unclear indication of the Golden Rule is being misused to alleviate one's conscience[19].

- *The Golden Rule is not a rule of tolerance*

Whose wishes, desires and values count in the end? Those of the agent, of his/her partner or of both together? Sometimes, the Golden Rule has been interpreted as a rule of mutual respect (or tolerance). But different people have different ideas, different beliefs, different tastes and preferences, no matter whether they belong to the same cultural background or to a different one. The Golden Rule in this sense could be understood as saying, "Even if you don't act unto others according to their belief, treat them with due respect". But what does "due respect" mean in a specific situation? If someone produces caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, Moslems would not respect that and would not be tolerant. If Christians are confronted with an atheist's ridiculing their faith, they would not tolerate that but insist on their right to be respected. Tolerance can be a virtue, but certainly not a remedy for the weaknesses of the Golden Rule as interpreted above.

- *The Golden Rule is not a form of radicalism*

There are suggestions to consider the Golden Rule as an expression of an all-embracing principle that is valid and "can be recognized in all life-affirming faiths

[18] Popper 1969-II. Sometimes such formulations are called "the Platinum Rule": "Do unto others as they want done unto them": http://www.platinumrule.com/index.html; see also footnote 26.

[19] Reiner 1974: 354f.

and secular moral codes"[20]. Then the author goes on and affirms as his Second Statement (out of Seven Statements): "The practice of the Golden Rule does not require the practice of any faith or secular tradition. Nor does it preclude or discourage such practice except where that tradition is antagonistic toward or dismissive of other experiences of the Divine." (ibid.) – It is certainly a temptation to find a universal principle that can be recognized "in all life-affirming faiths and secular moral codes". But there is nothing radical about the Golden Rule, it is just an attempt to universalize morality on a well confirmed postulate (without avoiding the problems mentioned earlier). Also, the author says that the practice of the Golden Rule does not require the practice of any faith and yet he affirms the experiences and even the presence of the Divine in the context of the Golden Rule. It is not clear what "reciprocity" means here and what values the followers of the Golden Rule should take into account.

- *The Golden Rule is not meant to produce absurdities*

Gensler discusses a number of implausible cases in his book and presents specifications to avoid such undesirable consequences[21]. The acting person has to consider the situation with its relevant circumstances. Suppose an ill person finds himself in an extremely deplorable state. He wants to apply the Golden Rule, "Treat others as you want to be treated" and thus thinks of merciful killing: 'If you want your doctor *P* to kill you, then you may kill *P*'. This is of course absurd, because it happens not infrequently that very ill people want to die, although they never think of killing their doctor. - Or: If you want a person *Q* to give some money to you, then you are to give some money to *Q*. Nobody would think this way, because the two acting people are in different situations. - Or: If I as a taxpayer want the Minister of Finance to lower the taxes, then I am to lower the taxes (if I were in that person's place). In all these examples, the situations of the involved people are not similar, thus not comparable and therefore not even imaginatively exchangeable.

- *The Golden Rule is not a version of the dictum "Might makes right"*

It has been suggested to understand the Golden Rule "realistically" as, "He who has the gold makes the rules"[22]. Morally understood, it suggests whoever is potent or rich enough can rule others or even determine what is right or wrong. Although in everyday practice, there are people who think themselves to be justified in acting that way, it is *morally not right* as the two persons involved are not on a par. The application of the Golden Rule requires situations or circumstances of comparable or equal quality as we have seen in the previous paragraph.

[20] David Keating in: http://www.goldenruleradical.org/goldenrule_statements.htm; Keating's starting point is a quote from Ghandi, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." In: http://www.goldenruleradical.org/ - I guess many people wouldn't do anything or just get drunk if they knew they would die tomorrow; and we were to live forever we would have "later" plenty of time to learn what is necessary to be learned.

[21] Gensler 1996: 95 ff.

[22] See: http://www.flickr.com/photos/teacherdudebbq2/4240414622/ (February 15, 2010)

3. SOME EXAMPLES OF THE GOLDEN RULE IN APPLIED ETHICS

To enhance the quality of life and to clarify the complicated and often distorted sectors of private as well as public life, the Golden Rule may serve as a fundamental principle in Applied Ethics. Let us consider a few examples of different life experiences in order to check the Golden Rule in one of its several versions.

Example 1: School life

Every child and many adults go to school or some other educational institution. It is the task and duty of the teachers to teach and educate their pupils to the best of their knowledge, i.e. to convey the appropriate knowledge, skills and training in order to achieve instructional goals and abilities that the syllabus prescribes. School policy and administration endow the teaching personnel with the authority to do their work. But what about their moral authority? The ethicist says, "Stick to the Golden Rule". Let us take [1] which reads, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". In applying this rule, the teacher should utilize her knowledge of what her pupils need and want, but should also be able to place herself in the situation of the pupils by means of her imagination. As a pupil, she would like to see her teacher friendly and patient, smiling and understanding, supporting and forgiving. In short, "Every teacher should be the way he would like his pupils to be"[23].

Example 2: Student life

The key of applying the Golden Rule, knowledge and imagination, is not only a directive for teachers, but also for students. At my university, smoking is by law strictly forbidden, as it is in all public buildings. Some students approach the building smoking and drop their cigarette while entering the building. Just the right occasion to quote Golden Rule [6]: "*Don't have your actions out of harmony with your desires (toward a reversed situation action*)". Obviously they do not think of the fact that someone must remove their garbage again and they themselves wouldn't like to do that. Thus, they do not place themselves into the position of the janitor nor do they try to imagine how they would react to an invited guest who enters their apartment and throws his cigarette to the floor. More generally speaking: Imagination helps us in this simple example to become aware of the ecological fact that the whole world is a huge apartment for us humans. It would be very helpful to ask ourselves if we want our small private apartment to be treated as we treat nature.

Example 3: US-American history

"In 1963, John F. Kennedy ordered Alabama National Guardsmen to help admit two clearly qualified Negro students to the University of Alabama. In his speech that evening JFK appealed to every American to 'stop and examine his

[23] This formulation of the famous 17th century pedagogue Comenius, I call the "Golden Rule of the Educator" in Zecha 2007.

conscience about this and other related incidents' throughout America. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who will represent him, ... then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?" ... "The heart of the question is ... whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated."[24] – Obviously, President Kennedy is alluding to version [2] of the Golden Rule, "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself" by drastically describing the consequences a change of their skin color would have for the white American. But the question remains whether the imagined values are true values to all people under all circumstances, in other words: if they are genuine moral values. By what value standard is it always agreeable to eat lunch in a public restaurant, send his children to best public schools and vote for the officials who will represent him? Many people don't consider it important to participate in general elections, don't send their children to best public school, but rather to private ones etc. Thus, this use of the Golden Rule [2] may sound rhetorically convincing in this particular situation – as President Kennedy's argument certainly does – but it is not necessarily convincing on rational and moral grounds.

Example 4: Business ethics

Ukrop's Supermarkets, Virginia, USA, pursue some very clear ethical guidelines. They say, "So what, exactly, is Ukrop's? We're a chain of grocery stores. But chances are, we're unlike any other supermarket you've seen. We're not just here; we're here to help. Just come into any of our stores. You'll find friendly faces and caring attitudes. Make a special request. We'll do everything possible to fulfill it. Shop away. We'll take all those groceries out to the car for you, and carefully pack them in your trunk (and a small 'thank you' is tip enough). ... Our drive to serve began as soon as our first store's doors opened in 1937. That's when Joe Ukrop decided to start a grocery store *based on the golden rule – treat others as you yourself would like to be treated.* It meant bringing people the best value for their grocery dollar (and those dollars were hard to come by in the middle of the Depression). And it meant treating every person, customers and associates alike, with the utmost respect."[25]

[24] Example taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic_of_reciprocity. See also the article "Ukrop's Super Markets, Inc.: Values in Action" by Robert S. Ukrop and Jacquelin Ukrop Aronson 2007.

[25] Taken from http://www.ukrops.com/about/about_ukrops.asp; emphasis added by G. Z. It should be noted, however, that other companies have adopted ethical directives different from the Golden Rule, e.g. United Natural Foods, Inc., an American company that calls itself, "America's Premier Certified Organic Distributor" has in its Business Code of Ethics: "…Reciprocity is a harmful practice and a hindrance to assuring the purchase of the best available materials or services at the lowest possible prices. A supplier of goods or services to the Company will not be asked to buy goods and services from the Company in order to become or to continue as a supplier." In: http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=93228&p=irol-govConduct#2

The partner of the owner (or company) in this case are the customers. We do not know if Mr. Ukrop applies the Golden Rule also to his employees, maybe he does. The value assumption here is that each customer desires to be treated friendly, wants the best grocery for her money and feels good altogether. The strategy of the owner obviously is confirmed by the experience of a *double reciprocity*: the owner imaginatively applies his individual desire of being served best into the place of the customer, whereas the customer may put her (rather selfish) interest in good shopping into the role of the business owner. It seems that the Golden Rule can help to create the classical *win-win-situation*, i.e. a strategy that allows both, or all, parties involved in a negotiation or another activity to be successful[26].

4. **SUMMARY**

The Golden Rule or the Ethics of Reciprocity is known in different formulations and different interpretations. Seven of them have been discussed in this article together with a variety of statements that do not represent this idea of putting oneself as an agent in the place of the other person. It has been argued that in its classical and philosophically refined form, the Golden Rule does not produce any definite moral advice or value statement yet it does help to gain productive perspectives if applied consistently with knowledge and imagination.

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[26] Fisher & Shapiro (2005) whose title is a bit misleading, as the application of the Golden Rule needs not only emotions (imagination) but reason as well. – More examples of applied business ethics can be found in Maxwell 2003 who argues that the Golden Rule creates the right atmosphere for business success. Even better, he suggests a supplement to it that he calls "the Platinum Rule": "Treat others better than they treat you": 113–114. – For a rich collection of "Golden Rule and business ethics" see: http://www.scarboromissions. ca/Golden_rule/business_ethics.php

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