

Universalism: Ideality? Hegemonism? Analysis Based on the Golden Rule

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Abstract

Universalism supports a sort of formal, abstract, and absolute universality. It manifests as the dualistic world view that separates the relations between universals and particulars, essence and phenomenon, reason and sensibility, and soul and flesh. If it goes to extremes, it will become nothing but self-identity that is beyond time and space and inane. Under the interpretation by universalism, the golden rule is a universal normalized character in conceptual form, a universal and abstract formal principle in status, an equivalent and reciprocal universalism orientation in connotation. If viewing the golden rule from this perspective, we will inevitably result in empty theories as well as hegemonism and power in practice.

Key words: Universalism; The Golden Rule; Hegemonism

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INTRODUCTION

The Golden Rule is a concept of the Western Christianity culture. There are words like “whatever you wish that

others would do to you, do also to them” or “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” in “Matthew” and “Luke” of the Christianity Holy Bible. This kind of discipline was regarded as the Golden Rule by westerners in the 17th century, indicating that it had the significance as top universal validity. Viewed from the sentence structure expressed by the Golden Rule, it is similar to the “doctrine of loyalty and consideration” (What you do not wish to yourself, do not do unto others) in the traditional culture of our nation in addition that proverbs in this kind of expression style could also be seen in many other cultures.

Therefore, exploration on the “global ethics” since the end of last century had focused on the golden rule to a great degree. A lot of people regard this as the basis for moral consensus and the moral principles able to be commonly abided by for realizing the dream of a harmonious world of human being. However, there are also other people opposing to this who thought that the similarity in linguistic form did not mean consistency with the contents in addition that this kind of pursuit for “universal values” and the Golden Rule has the risk of leading to hegemonism in real life. It is not irrational to have this kind of concern. In fact, there is a tradition of universalism in Western culture, and hegemonism will not be such an alarmism if the Golden Rule is viewed from the perspective of universalism.

1. THE ESSENCE OF UNIVERSALISM

Universalism advocates for a kind of absolute universality, and this term has been applied to many fields including culture, politics, art, religion, and law, etc. No theory or think could completely avoid a kind of universality because no issue could be discussed without universality, let alone being contemplated or communicated. This is the important idiosyncrasy of spirit.

However, it is quite a different thing to pursue an absolute universality. The tradition of western thinking

and culture has been oriented to the pursuit of a certain kind of absolute universality. The ancient Greek sages had opened up the road for pursuing “generalization” and “universality”. We have already seen the inquiry on this kind of universal questions like “primordium” or “arche” from philosophers in early eras who took water, fire, gas, abstract atoms, “infinity”, or “one” as the principle, that is, “absoluteness” and began to realize that nothing but the “one” behind matters was the essential, real, and single existence of *anun-*dfursichsein**.

Here a kind of abandon of our sensory perception has taken place, that is, a kind of forsaking of direct existence; and a kind of withdrawal from direct existence...Therefore, it has been confirmed that there is only one “generalization”, that is, the existence of *anun-*dfursichsein**, and this is a pure *anschauung* without fantasy, which is also the thinking that sees very clearly that there is only a “one”. (Hegel, 1997, p.187)

This kind of thinking of generalization had realized systematic development in Plato who became the one establishing the most complete thinking system of universalism in ancient Greek due to his creation of the philosophical system of “idealism”. In the views of Plato, those things that were emotional, direct, individual, changing, and polymerous were all not real and only universals, form, and conceptions were real, absolute and reliable.

As a kind of real existence, conception exists independently in the other world and it is also the prototype of the things in our actual life. For example, an ordinary horse, which is also the conception of horse, is the prototype of a concrete horse; the generalization of kindness, that is, the absolute kindness, is the prototype of the concrete kindness in our life. “Conception” is viewed as the perfect existence different from the reasonable world and also taken as the target for thinking and knowledge. Here it has included the world view of dualism, thus how people living in a reasonable world understand the “conception” in the other world has become a dilemma for traditional western philosophy.

The theory of Plato had been vitally determinant to the establishment of the traditional western philosophical form. The dreams about the God and the Heaven in Christianity as well as the contradiction between the heaven and the secular world is almost the reprint of the contradiction between the absolute “world of conception” in Platonism and the reasonable world. “Christianity that including this noble principle in itself had become this rational organization via the great beginning made by Plato and thus turned out to be this super perceptual nation.” (Hegel, 1997, p.152) The rising of Christianity has marked that the tradition of the Western universalism had developed to be mature. In Christianity the God is the sole god that requires the believers to only believe in the God and prohibits the belief in other gods. Many chapters in the Holy Bible have mentioned that Jehovah is the only God.

The dominant position of Christianity had begun to be shaken in modern times, but the orientation of universalism had been inherited in another style. The universal humanity had replaced the universal divine, the universality of science had replaced that of divine, and thus to recognize this kind of universality and establishing scientific universal standards and rules have become the goals of all knowledge. As the essential prescript, fundamental reason and determinant reasons, common things are the force of unity behind the colorful and complex things, and it provides templates for diversity to realize consistency and thus the supreme authority and standards. Therefore, this universality able to exist independently and the universal correctness surpassing specialty had been directly regarded as the rule and standards to be spread. In modern times the authority of rationalism had replaced the sovereignty of the God, and one kind of universality had substituted another one.

Universality seems to have become a sword of king, and the person holding its hilt could direct and rule all things as a legitimate leader. It is the spokesperson of civilization, the representative of universal value, and the human liberator that had been taken as the plea by hegemonism, imperialism, and the “unilateralism” in today’s international relationship to conduct activities like invasion, conquering, and interference. Till now universality, universalism, and universal value are still questions arousing ceaseless quarrels.

From the perspective of modern countries, on one side if a person does not acknowledge the universalism of knowledge and value it would be difficult for him to be integrated into the modern society, let alone to survive, develop, or compete; and on the other hand, universalism has often appear in the style of “western centrism”, thus threatening the independent self-existence of a nation or nationality. This kind of dilemma has also been manifested in all aspects of modern life especially in that under the pattern of unceasing multicultural development the tension between universality and specialty as well as universality and individuality had been increasingly highlighted.

In a summary, the pursuit of absolute universality, that is, universalism, mainly has the three following essential characteristics: firstly, it advocated the separation of universality from specialty, essence from phenomenon, sense from sensibility, and spirit from flesh. Therefore, the pursuit of absolute universality is based on the world view of dualism. This kind of dualism of Platonism also has very strong print in modern and contemporary western epistemology. When Kant was speaking of “the world of pure understanding” and “the world of senses”, he pointed out that

We could call the former one (the world of pure understanding) as an archetypal world (*natura archetypa*), which could only be known by us in reason, while the latter one (the world of senses) could be regarded as a copied world (*natura ectypa*) because it

includes the possible results of the notions in the previous world, which act as the basis for the provisions of will. (Kant, 2003, p.57)

Secondly, what is absolutely universal is also beyond time. The phenomenal world is concrete, and the objects of experience are always within time and space and develop in a changing way, while the pure concept of a priori is beyond time. The God in Christianity had created time and space from outside the time and space, and He himself is everlasting. The moral law of Kant is the moral rule of all “rational beings”, and the “Natural Law” of Hobbes is the rule for all human beings. All these are of absolute transcendence.

Thirdly, the absolute universalism is a kind of abstract and inane universalism of ego identity, and it is also beyond time, so it is a motionless and closed system. Nothing but $A=A$ has been left in this absolute universalism. All are one. The existence of one could not be proved by experience, so all experience is limited. If it wishes to resort to infinity, it could only depend on the pure thinking going around in circles in itself. Therefore, universalism is usually the dogmatism in theory.

2. INTERPRETATION OF THE UNIVERSALISM OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Universalism has been manifested as the pursuit of supreme kindness and the universal law of moral in the theory of morality. Universalism is closely related to normative ethics, which usually involve with issues about universalism, while the understanding of universalism on morality is often normative and often takes the obtaining of universal norms as the theoretical purpose. Moral universalism aims to find the essential prescript of universalism behind various kinds of moral phenomena, and this kind of prescript could provide both possibility for the understanding of “morality” and directions and basis for

Firstly, if viewed from the conceptual form of the Golden Rule, it has manifested the characters of universal norms. It is the fundamental thinking of the western moral philosophy to look for that absolutely universal “notion” behind the moral phenomena, while since the modern time ethics had further generalized this “notion” to be a certain kind of rule — the rule of theological ethics, the rule of practical reason, the rule of nature, and the rule of moral language, etc. Generally speaking, the reason for the Golden Law to be golden lies in that the beautiful name of the “No. 1” rule of moral has its universal validity in this moral world.

This kind of universality is based either on the universality of the absolute God, universal reason, common humanity, or common linguistic norms. In a summary, the Golden rule has been positioned on one of its universalities within the theory of morality. Today we

could see the silver rule, copper rule and iron rule had been derived on the basis of the Golden Rule. The division of this kind of grades and sequences almost all came from their degrees of “universalities”, too.

Secondly, the Golden Rule had been taken as the formal principle of universal abstract. It is from the perspective of theological universalism of the Christian theology interpreted the Golden Rule. In the Christian theology, law and discipline had been summarized as “Love of the God” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”, while “the love of the God” was the premise and purpose of “love of others” and “love of oneself”, and love of others was the method for the love of the God. In addition, love of others is not the love of a concrete and realistic person having both spirit and flesh but the love of the universal spirit towards the God. This kind of love is an abstract and universal love.

Jesus said in “Matthew of the Holy Bible” that

Do not think that I had come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I had come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

Here it did not mean to deliberately make a mess or to wage war, instead, it just said to cut off the various kinds of concrete relationships among people, especially those social interpersonal relationships so that human being could surpass the mundane world and get relieved from the body of flesh and blood, thus becoming a common, ordinary, and equal person.

The absolute order of Kant is the most classical rule of law of reason universality. Kant thought that only the principle universally effective on every reasonable existence was the rule of law in practice, that is, the rule of morality. Therefore, the rule of moral of him had been stated as that “to act in this way, so as to enable the rule of your will to be regarded as a principle for universal legislation at all times simultaneously.” (Ibid., p.39) This “principle for universal legislation” is independent from the formal rule of experience.

In the view of Kant, the rule of moral would lose the absolute universality once it was mixed with materials of experience. Therefore, Kant pointed out that the “love” in the traditional Christian Golden Rule “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” was not the “love” of subjective experience but a love of reason and the respect to the common rule of morality. Therefore, the “love” as a “hobby” or the “pathological love” was not the universal love. To love the God should not be a subjective favor because the God is not the target of sense organs, and the love of universal things could only be realized through universal reasons.

The empirical moral doctrine is also to pursue the universal rule of moral, but they have constructed the universality on the basis of a certain kind of humanity that would not change congenitally. It would be either vicious

humanity, or kind humanity, or a kind of subjective ability commonly held by human being like compassion. It is also a kind of manifestation of traditional universalism to regard humanity, also called as the human essence, as a closed and changeless existence behind a concrete person.

Egoism and utilitarianism are just the results of moral taken as self-love, which took the Golden Rule as the universal rule for ensuring personal interests or group benefits. The analytical ethics also proposed the issue of universal norms from the perspective of moral language. Hegel had directly taken to the Golden Rule as an expression of his “universalizable principle”, that is, “a moral judgment requires that if another person is in an identical situation, the identical judgment should be made in this situation (Hare, 1963, pp.48-49).

Finally, the interpretation of “equivalence” and “reciprocity” of the connotation of the Golden Rule includes the orientation of universalism, which had usually manifested as the pursuit of the absolute universality of rules and norms. This kind of pursuit has also always defended for its rationality in the name of equality and with the purpose of reciprocity. The Golden Rule had usually been taken as the moral rule of equality and reciprocity. Therefore, the several kinds of expression equations of the Golden Rule, such as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”, and “What you do not wish to yourself, do not do unto others”, etc., had all included the treatment on the issue of the relationship between others and a person him or herself.

Universalism had tried to establish a kind of equal normative system for this kind of relationship among people so as to achieve equality. Just as some scholars had pointed out,

the fundamental structure of various kinds of golden rules was still consistent, that is, to emphasize the reciprocity. This structure is not wrong. The structure of reciprocity should be the most rational structure for expressing the relationship between ‘I and others’, so a fair relationship could not be expressed unless under a structure of reciprocity, while the Golden Rule is just for the expression of fair relationship. (Zhao, 2005, p.74)

So, what should be answered by the Golden Rule is whether “equivalence” or “reciprocity” under this kind of positioning.

It was just in this meaning that Schopenhauer criticized the traditional Golden Rule and the moral rule of Kant, and he pointed out that the starting point for “I like” was egocentric. However, in the eyes of those of egoism and utilitarianism, this “I like” just clarified the purpose of the “reciprocity” of morality. The reason why Hobbes regarded the Golden Rule as the general rule for natural rule lied in that in his eyes the purposes for a person to compromise his private interest to some degree or even sacrifice some of his own interest in some circumstances were all to restore or increase the personal interests in “reciprocity”.

This kind of moral had been manifested as a kind of form for economic exchange, that is, “if the partner for reciprocal exchange is beneficial and if you are really caring about other persons, you will be more likely to be chosen as the partner, and then you will have the benefit for evolution if you really care about other persons” or “usually we have good reasons to believe that the moral practice lies in commercial interest, and this is the justifiable motivation based on moral actions.” (Bauman, 2003, p.63)

In a summary, the interpretation of the Golden Rule with universalism had mainly manifested as two tendencies. On the one hand, because the Golden Rule is required according to the abstract universality so as to render it become a theorem of moral universality, thus it has to become the absolute order of Kant to pursue an absolute universality and ultimacy; while when the Golden Rule is applied to concrete issues, it also manifests as the egoism taking the abstract “equivalence” and “reciprocity” as the excuses.

3. THE HEGEMONISTIC DANGER OF THE IDEALITY OF UNIVERSALISM

The interpretation of the Golden Rule of universalism had rendered it to drop into an abstract empty in theory. The Christian theology has required loving other people just like loving the God, while the God was absolute superior, unique, indistinctive, and motionless, and this kind of love to the God was also a kind of abstract love. Therefore, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” had also become a little empty in this kind of abstract and universal love. Kant used to point out that here “love of others” was from the respect of rules, and “if we have done but they are just what we like”, then, “therefore, that piece of rule of all rules will manifest the will of morality in all of its perfection like all the moral rules in the gospels” (Kant, 2003, p.114).

The moral rule proposed by Kant himself is also pure, universal and absolute, and it is also a law of will toward “extreme kindness” and “kingdom of purpose”. This moral rule is the force of the unconditional, inevitable, and transcendental behavior of command, and it is not limited by any experience, lust, stake or effect or not but only based on itself. In fact, this formal rule is constructed according to the style of formal logic, according to which the larger the extension is, the less connotation it will be; and on the contrary, the more the connotation is, the less the extension will be. Therefore, the law established for all the reasonable existences will be nothing but a empty rule of formalization.

It was just because Kant had deduced the absolute universalism so thoroughly that its emptiness and abstraction had been exposed completely.

Here what we see is also nothing. Because the so-called moral rule is nothing else except unity, self-consistency, and

universality. The formal principles for legislation in this kind of isolated status could not acquire any content or regulation. The only form this principle had been the unity of itself. This kind of principle of universality and non-contradictoriness of itself are a kind of empty thing, and this kind of empty principle could not realize substantiality in the aspects of practice or theory. (Hegel, 1997, p.290)

It is different from the transcendental philosophy of Kant that the empirical ethics had tried to take experience as the basis and starting points to interpret the Golden Rule, but it was difficult to say that this kind of experience was concrete, realistic, or live experience because they had still regard the human essence as the intrinsic abstract thing of a person and sum up it as an abstract and changeless universal humanity, that is, a kind of congenital selfish or moral sense. The moral rule or the Golden Rule constructed on the basis of this fixed and universal humanity had actually become a false and empty thing. For example, to egoism and utilitarianism morality often loses the meaning it should have due to the immorality and unethicalness on the constructed basis of it.

Universalism pursues a certain kind of absolute universality, and this kind of absolute universality, such as the God, pure reason, and universal humanity, is all of abstract universality, beyond time, and independently existing by itself and also regarded as having all individual, concrete, and special forces. Therefore, in the actual life, people always intentionally or unintentionally resort to that absolute universality and pose as the administrator of absolute universality, but actually it just imposes a certain kind of concrete and special requirements or desire on other persons, thus it is inevitable that it would fall into power and hegemony.

Various kinds of political and military invasion activities in modern and contemporary times had collectively manifested the western centralism supported by this kind of universalism. The Golden Rule interpreted with universalism is a piece of absolutely universal moral norm, and the right to interpret this norm has often been regarded as belonging to the western civilization. Just as Huntington had said, "Imperialism is a necessary and logical result of universalism." (Huntington, 1996, p.6)

The understanding on the "equivalent" universalism of the Golden Rule has been manifested as the universal appeal of a certain kind of norm and principle. We could see this kind of intention of the moral rule of Kant, egoism, utilitarianism, and theory of compassion. In fact, in our daily life people usually turn the Golden Rule to such a form that "I will treat others in the way they treat me" or "Other people should treat me in the way I treat them" or even an extreme expression of "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (which is also called as an Iron Rule).

But actually, in the moral relationship, all the responsibilities were just borne by the "I" as the main body, all my requirements and norms are only binding on "me", and "responsibility" and "norms" are only

moral when they are targeting "me". Once "I" wish to use it to require and bind other persons, it would lose its moral connotation absolutely. For instance, "I sacrifice for others" is a kind of morality, while it is obviously not moral that "other people should also sacrifice for me".

Just as what had been said by Zygmunt Bauman, "Relationship is one-way, non-reciprocal, and should not be reversed, and they are just the determinant characters that a kind of moral standpoint must have", and

it is just the uniqueness (not the "universality") and non-exchangeability of this kind of responsibility that had put me into the moral relationship. This is where its value lies, no matter all other compatriots would do the thing I will do for their compatriots. (Bauman, 2003, p. 56, 63)

McIntyre also said, "We refuse to recognize this kind of person who legislates for any person other than himself, which is based on ethical position." (Macintyre, 1957, p.325)

Universalism had taken the Golden Rule as the moral principle and standards for absolute universality, which rendered it to drop into an abstract emptiness and usually manifested as the opposite side of morality in practice, that is, selfish and invasion against others. I think there are two reasons for this: firstly, the fundamental characters of the abstract universalism are self-identification of no regulation, no distinction, and no contents. "Every content put into this kind of abstract form is of no contradiction in itself. But if it is not put into this kind of abstract form, the contents will not be the same" (Hegel, 1997, p.291). Therefore, in real practice all kinds of behaviors, no matter they are moral or not, could all find their footholds in this kind of formal principle and defend for their rationality.

Secondly, the universality in the understanding of universalism is an independent existence that is independent from individuality, special, abstract, and beyond time. Once this universal existence is grasped by thinking, it seems to become once and for all and valid everywhere. Therefore, if there is a person thinking that he had mastered this kind of absolute universality in his thinking, then he would also think himself to be responsible for establishing standards and benchmark for all practices. This is the theoretical basis for modern hegemonism. This kind of universalism is just the logical basis for those people who regard themselves as the representative of truth, the spokesman of civilization, and the promotor of democracy and human rights so as to conduct various kinds of national oppressions and violent conquering.

However, this kind of absolute universal existence is nothing but a kind of abstract of thinking, if it is taken as the instruction for practice, it could just only be manifested as imposing its own living style, moral norms, and laws and regulations onto other people. Then, the competition of the so-called moral universal principle would thus evolve to a kind of competition of power, and

now there is more than one kind of notion of universal morality, and which kind of notion among them would win depends on the comparative amount of the strength of the authority institution that claims and could clearly express its rights. (Bauman, 2003, p.49)

Therefore, if the Golden Rule could be regarded as being meaningful and valuable, then we should understand the relationships between universality and specialty as well as identification and difference included in it. Neither universalism nor particularism should be understood as the relationship between universality and specialty so as to “have assumed that the pure identification or abstract identification as a kind of existence of itself in advance and in the meantime also presumed that distinction is another kind of independent existence in the same way” (Hegel, 2005, p. 250), thus going to two extremities.

However, if analysis is only conducted within the scope of thinking, we would all find the dialectical relationship between universality and specialty, that is,

equivalence is just an identification among the things that are different from each other and not identical to each other. Inequality is just the relationship among the things not equal to each other. Therefore, these two are not irrelevant aspects or ideas, but one party is reflected within another party. (Ibid., 253)

In addition, this kind of dialectical relationship is not only a theoretical mental analysis, and it had always been accompanied by the contradictory development of universality and specialty if viewed from the practical lives of human being. Thus it is not hard to understand why the so-called “cultural universalism” and “universal value” have always been manifested as “western centralism” in modern time. In fact, the absolutization of universality is also the absolutization of specialty.

Then, it should be said that the reason why this kind of expression style of the Golden Rule could be popular for thousands of years and had its own hints in various kinds of culture did not lie in that it was a formal principle or an absolutely abstract universal norm. The Golden Rule is a cultural product of the historical activities of human beings from being self-existence to self-making, and it had come from the practice of the lives of human being. Furthermore, what it had treated was also

the live relationships among people in lives instead of any relationship among the ethical unit that had been abstractly purified. Therefore, all those trials to revise the Golden Rule through the abstraction of concrete personality and concrete living situation so as to realize universality and objectivity could only go off on a tangent. (Wang, 2001, p.98)

The universality included in the Golden Rule is not a purely speculative and abstract universality, not is it a hegemonism of virtual particularism in the name of universality. Instead, it had contained the universal value

and meanings of the mutual understanding, joint living, and harmonious being-with of human beings. This kind of universality is not an absolute or ultimate universality or the artificial “universality” of a certain kind of model of concrete behavior or living style; instead, it is a universal spirit continuously developing in the practical activity and historical creation of human beings. This kind of universal spirit could only be the universality manifested in various kinds of concrete practice. It is just on the basis of social and historical practice that the Golden Rule had been manifested as the moral spirit of equality, fairness, benevolence, friendliness, and tolerance, etc..

The Golden Rule does not require me or us to treat or require others by taking our own desires, needs, or the recognized value as an absolute universal thing, instead, it instructs us to mutually understand, tolerate, and be sincere to each other in real intercourse, judge another person’s feelings by one’s own, understand specialty in universality, and pursue universality in specialty so as to realize the harmony of the society of human being. Therefore, the Golden Rule is not an ultimate, closed and ossified universal principle or what could successfully achieve the moral activities once being mastered and put into practice by us. Instead, it is an opening and developing moral principle with unlimited and rich connotation, and it guides people to continue to explore the road of moral life in concrete practice.

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