

“How Would You Like to be Him?” The Golden Rule, Third Person Descriptions, and Virtue Ethics

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IN ORDER TO ATTAIN THE ethical point of view, an individual must shift perspectives in a way that moves beyond egoism. Thomas Nagel once suggested that the moral point of view can be arrived at by asking the simple question, “How would you like it if someone did that to you?” (Nagel 82+). This is a useful heuristic. But I would like to suggest another. We should also ask a different question: “How would you like to be him (or her)?”¹ Nagel’s question is another way of formulating the Golden Rule: it provides a path toward altruism. The question “How would you like to be him?” leads us toward the standpoint of virtue ethics. It also reminds us of the ideal of character that is typical of the virtue account. The Golden Rule leads us from the first person perspective toward concern for the “second person”; that is, from “I” to “you” (or perhaps toward “thou” in Buber’s sense). The question of virtue ethics moves from the first person to the “third person” in a way that emphasizes biography, history, and narrative identity. My goal here is to show some of the difficulties of relying on the Golden Rule and to defend the entry into virtue ethics that is provided by the third person standpoint. I do not intend to claim that we should replace Nagel’s question with mine. Indeed, the virtue approach may include altruism. But my goal is to motivate us to think more carefully about the sorts of persons we’d like to become.

The Difficulty of the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is a time-honored staple of moral discourse, handed down as a principle of morality in a variety of traditions (see Wattle). Greek philosophers such as Thales and Epicurus offered it as a basic moral principle. Confucius offered us a version of it. We find it in Buddhism. The Rabbi Hillel claimed that the whole of the law could be summed up in the Golden

Rule. Jesus claimed that the basis of morality was to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. And psychologists such as Piaget and Kohlberg recognize that normal human development moves toward what might be called a "Golden Rule stage" in which a child learns to adopt the standpoint of the other.

Philosophers have not been as fond of the Golden Rule as have religious and popular moralists. But the basic ideal of the Golden Rule is important both for utilitarianism and for Kantian deontology. An important feature of both of these approaches to ethics is a basic commitment to altruism and to the equality of persons. Egoism is rejected by both approaches. Moreover, we are not supposed to privilege any one person over any other. The Golden Rule states, "Love your neighbor as yourself" or "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In either formulation, the goal is to achieve a standpoint in which we imagine a sort of equality between "I and you": I could be you and you could be me. Each person whose proper name can be a replacement value for "I" or "you" should be treated equally.

Both Mill and Kant share this idea of treating persons equally, from the standpoint of a disinterested, impartial, and benevolent spectator. Indeed, each admits that his ethical theory can be understood as developing the basic idea of the Golden Rule. Mill claims that the utilitarian principle of "The greatest happiness for the greatest number" is a variant of the Golden Rule that asks us to generalize our concern for the interests of others. In chapter 2 of *Utilitarianism*, Mill writes, "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the Golden Rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. 'To do as you would be done by' and 'To love your neighbor as yourself' constitute the ideal perfection of the utilitarian morality (22).

Kant also discusses the Golden Rule in a variety of places. Kant famously argues that the Golden Rule was limited as a rule for ethics in a much-quoted footnote to his *Groundwork*.² In that footnote, Kant claims that the problem is that the Golden Rule permits too much subjectivity in thinking about ethics. The desires of various "you's" differ; and so the Golden Rule cannot establish a universal law. But in his *Religion* book, Kant offers a more favorable assessment. In commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, Kant reinterprets the Golden Rule in his own fashion.

Finally, he (Jesus) combines all duties (1) in one *universal* rule (which includes within itself both the inner and the outer moral relations of men), namely, to perform your duty for no motive other than unconditioned

esteem for duty itself, i.e., love God (the Legislator of all duties) above all else; and (2) in a *particular* rule, that, namely, which concerns man's external relation to other men as universal duty: Love everyone as yourself, i.e., further his welfare from good-will that is immediate and not derived from motives of self-advantage. (Kant, *Religion Within* 148)

Indeed, the second formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative can be read as a variant on the Golden Rule. "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only" is quite similar to the idea of loving your neighbor as yourself. And the first formulation asks us to shift perspectives in a truly universal direction: "Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be willed as a universal law." Like Jesus and Mill, Kant wants us to "love your neighbor as yourself," with the caveat that this universal love should not contain any element of subjectivity: it should be a love that is mediated by the universal (what Kant calls here—God).

In more contemporary philosophizing, the Golden Rule has been extensively refined and defended by Harry Gensler. Gensler admits that the Golden Rule and its popular variants (i.e., "put yourself in the shoes of another," etc.) lead to absurdities if taken literally (as if one were literally supposed to put on someone else's shoes). Rather, Gensler interprets the Golden Rule as a principle of consistency, along the same lines as what Kant and Mill had in mind: judgments about the morality of actions should be applied consistently across persons, without egoistic bias. Gensler also claims that the Golden Rule creates a useful exercise for the moral imagination. "To apply the golden rule adequately, we need knowledge and imagination. We need to know what effect our actions have on the lives of others. And we need to be able to imagine ourselves, vividly and accurately, in the other person's place on the receiving end of the action" (94).

Despite Gensler's enthusiasm for the Golden Rule, other philosophers are more cautious. R. M. Hare reminds us that the difficulty of using the Golden Rule has to do with the slippery nature of the nouns and pronouns involved as well as the hypothetical nature of the judgment (Hare, *Freedom and Reason*). Nagel's formulation asks us to make a hypothetical judgment about a counterfactual situation in which I am in the place of another. But Hare points out that one might respond by saying they have no idea whether they would like it if someone did that to them. In fact, it is important to remember how difficult it is to imagine oneself into the place of another.³ Hare himself, in his interesting discussion of abortion and the Golden Rule,

asks his reader to imagine "how would you like it if you were aborted?"⁴ Hare recognizes that this requires an imaginative turn to the counter-factual and hypothetical. When I apply the Golden Rule in the case of abortion, as Hare does, the question is whether I would have liked to have had that action (i.e., abortion) done to me. Hare admits that this requires us to modify the Golden Rule. Instead of focusing on the present, Hare asks us to consider a version of the Golden Rule which states that you should "do unto others what you are glad was done to you."

While it does seem intuitively plausible that we could make Golden Rule judgments about abortion, further reflection shows that this is all very puzzling. With regard to abortion, I am not sure how I would even begin thinking about the question of whether I am glad to have been born, since it doesn't seem that I ever had much choice in the matter. My birth is simply a fact for me—a given; and it seems odd to ask myself whether I am glad it happened. On the other hand, this sort of question has been asked at least since the time of Job. And certainly it does make sense to wonder if fetuses who are diagnosed with severe disabilities will have lives that are worth living.⁵ But the difficulty is that ultimately I am not sure how I would have liked it if I were aborted, since I imagine that I wouldn't be around to think about it. Moreover, it is odd for me to make a judgment about the overall value of my life while in the middle of it. Although I am happy with my life so far, my life has not ended yet; and it may turn out that some horrible calamity could change my judgment about its value. This shows us the difficulty of using the Golden Rule in dealing with a topic such as abortion.

Now one might claim that the Golden Rule can be applied more directly to other less complicated topics. Imagine another Golden Rule question: How would I like it if someone enslaved me? I imagine that I would not like it. And thus it appears that the Golden Rule could be used to argue against slavery. Slavery appears to violate the idea of loving your neighbor as yourself: it is difficult to see how slavery can be enforced out of love. But Epictetus and the Stoics remind us that it is possible to be a contented slave. And even Jesus, the greatest advocate of the Golden Rule, did not say that slavery was wrong (indeed, the New Testament takes it for granted that slavery exists without condemning it).⁶ In a society based on slavery, judgments about slavery—and whether I or you would like it or not—will be different from judgments made in a liberal-democratic society that has abolished slavery. The beauty of the Golden Rule is its basic problem: it asks us to imagine that we are someone else. This is a useful heuristic. But it is also quite difficult to

carry out in the majority of controversial cases, especially if we acknowledge differences in social, cultural, and political contexts.

The Golden Rule is a useful heuristic because it asks us to exercise our moral imaginations. The ideal of imagining myself as someone other than myself requires some complex cognitive abilities. And in reality, it is more difficult to pull off than many moralists want to admit. This move is facilitated by language. Pronouns or indexicals like “I” and “you” and “him” allow us to exchange them among persons: “I” and “you” and “him” can each refer to the same person but from a different perspective. Our language allows us to stretch our imaginations in this way. But it is important to recognize that language can be used in the same way to articulate the quite different process of imagining that you actually are someone else. Instead of asking whether I would like it if you *did* that to me, I can also ask how I would like to *be* you. And this question points beyond altruism toward virtue ethics.

Generally, Golden Rule-type heuristics are directed at judgments about specific actions. In the formulation of the Golden Rule that states, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” it is the deed that is important. The alternative approach of virtue ethics focuses on habits, dispositions, character traits, etc.; in other words, not on actions but on the being of the person. For this approach, the proper heuristic is to imagine oneself into the being of another. Rather than asking “How would I like it if someone did that to me?” I should ask, “Would I want to be him?” This move to the third person fits well within an approach to ethics that emphasizes virtue and narrative identity. A useful ethical heuristic is to learn to describe oneself in the third person. Rather than saying “I” and describing my life using the first person, it is useful to say “he” when referring to myself and to describe my life in the third person. At the end of the day one hopes to be able to say about oneself, “I am proud to be him,” and thus to affirm the biography and history that I am always in the process of developing.

The Problem of “You”

The Golden Rule and its modern variants assumes that we know what it means to apply the pronouns employed. The most important point here is that the referent of both of the instances of “you” in the Golden Rule is supposed to be the same person. It is easy not to notice that there are two uses of the word “you” in the standard formulation of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as *you* would have them do unto *you*.” (There is also an implied “you” in the imperative command: the command “do” implies a “you” who is being given

the command. For the sake of simplicity I'll ignore this "you" in what follows.) But one could imagine an articulation of "the Golden Rule" in which these two instances of "you" did not refer to the same person. Imagine that Jesus pointed to two different people when he stated the Golden Rule. So Jesus says, "Do unto others as *you* (*pointing to Judas*) would have them do unto *you* (*pointing to Peter*)." If this were the context, it would be dangerous to generalize—since Judas is not considered to be a moral exemplar. This is why Mill's interpretation of the Golden Rule connects it to the standpoint of a disinterested benevolent spectator. It is not supposed to be about Judas, but about some generalized "you" abstracted from particular interests and personality. In Kant's interpretation, the point is that particular love must be complemented by esteem for duty itself. In Mill's interpretation it is mediated by the standpoint of an impartial benevolent spectator, each and any "you" should be treated as equal.

We might note that there is further ambiguity here, since the pronoun "them" is not clearly defined. To stick with the Jesus example, note how the sense of the Golden Rule would change if "them" were meant to refer to "the Romans," "the rest of the disciples," or "the Jewish people," etc. To make this clear, we would need to underline "them" and indicate the referent by pointing. So now Jesus might say, "Do unto others as *you* (*pointing to Judas*) would have *them* (*pointing to the Romans*) do unto *you* (*pointing to Peter*)." And in this context this would mean that we should strive to have the political authorities persecute dissidents.

It is important to notice that in the Golden Rule "you" is being used both as a subject (the you who is doing unto others) and as an object (the you who is being done unto). We do not know exactly *what* we are supposed to do here. But we seem to know *who* is doing it and *to whom* it is being done. However, the difficulty of figuring out what to do is that the *what* seems to depend on the persons who are doing it and who it is being done unto. Refusing to provide food and drink to a healthy person would be cruelty; but refusal to provide nourishment may be a sort of kindness to a person who is fasting or who wants to get on with dying. When we fill in names for the pronouns, we can see the difficulty. Is President Bush supposed to do unto Osama bin Ladin what Osama bin Ladin would do unto him? This leads us to Kant's point when he claimed, in that footnote to the *Groundwork*, that the Golden Rule was ultimately not useful: the use of personal pronouns that beg to be replaced by particular names leads to too much contingency based upon the variable desires of subjectivity. Morality is not supposed to be about the whims of particular persons. Rather, it is supposed to be about rational principles that would be agreed to by all rational persons.

We must admit then that there are complications when using first and second person pronouns like “I” and “you” in thinking about ethics. Nonetheless, the Golden Rule remains a useful heuristic. The Golden Rule is useful insofar as it reminds us of the goal of consistence and also insofar as it encourages us to stretch our moral imaginations in ways that take into account the perspective of the other.

From “I” and “You” to “He” and “Him”

Now the turn to the third person is fraught with similar sorts of problems with regard to how we are supposed to replace pronouns such as “he” and “him.” In thinking about whether “I would want to be him,” it all depends on the “him” we are talking about. But the question aims to help us think about moral exemplars. Ultimately the goal is to ask yourself whether you want to be like this or that exemplar. This approach is somewhat different from the above mentioned approaches, since its primary purpose is not to develop altruistic regard for the desires of the other. Rather, third person descriptions are most useful for achieving the standpoint of virtue ethics and for seeing that virtue is about concrete moral exemplars and the sorts of persons it is admirable to become.

The standpoint of virtue ethic is best attained by describing our own actions in the third person. The motivating question for egoism is “What do *I* want?” The motivating question for altruism is “What do *you* want?” But the motivating question for virtue ethics is “*Who* is it admirable to become?” Stated more generally, this question is “Would you want to be someone like that?” “Would you want to be a person like him?” or, “What sort of person do you want to become?”

These sorts of questions direct our attention to certain objective character traits. When I ask, “Would I want to be him?” I ask whether I would want to have a character of that sort or to live a life like that. Rather than focusing on particular actions or desires, the question focuses on biography and narrative identity. Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and others suggest that selfhood, especially in the virtue tradition, has to do with the creation of narrative unity over time.⁷ By focusing on narrative unity as a creative achievement, we may resolve some puzzles about personal identity through time and the use of indexicals in moral philosophy. Indeed, it might be that the use of proper names only—avoiding indexicals altogether—may be quite a useful practice for achieving the point of view of virtue ethics and for thinking about character and narrative unity. At the very least, remembering that there

is a third person perspective on one's own life helps us escape from solipsism and narcissism. The move toward the third person perspective aims at a sort of omniscient narrative view of the self in which character is viewed as the more or less permanent biographical residue of life lived in the first person.

The attempt to describe ourselves in the third person can help us to respond to some of the problems raised by those philosophers like Doris and Harman who are skeptical about character.⁸ What I want to suggest, contra Doris and Harman, is that character and virtue are known or evaluated retrospectively. We see character after the fact, as it were, reflected in the history of the person. I don't know in advance whether I am courageous. I must act and see what I do: I test myself as it were throughout my life. And then I can assess retrospectively the sort of person I have become. In other words, the "I" who is acting in the present becomes a "him" who is the subject of "my" biography. Doris and Harman emphasize the fact that there is situational variety in the way that people respond to the world; and they argue that this gives us reason to doubt that character exists. I agree with Doris and Harman to the extent that there is situational variety in how I respond to the world. But I can see a pattern in retrospect: character emerges through the course of life—through biography. And in fact, we assume that this is true when we deal with one another. We can predict how different people will respond to different challenges. Yes, there is situational variety. But the better we know a person, the more likely that our predictions are going to be correct.

We know ourselves in the same way, as it were: from the outside. The better I know myself—by looking at myself as "he" or "him" from the outside—the better I can predict how I will behave in diverse situations. And indeed, I need to know myself in this external way in order to take care to put myself into situations that tend to reinforce good responses and minimize morally deficient responses. This is the key idea of Aristotle's practical advice about how best to hit the mean.

But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent. (Book II, sec. 9)

According to Aristotle, we train ourselves for virtue by knowing ourselves and our own tendencies, as it were, from the outside. We should not just dwell in subjectivity and wishful thinking about the sort of person we wish we were.

Rather, we must measure the extent to which our own subjective predispositions lead us astray; and then we must make sure to correct the situation by “dragging ourselves away” from temptations and pushing ourselves the right direction and into situations that reinforce virtue while minimizing vice.

The essential idea here is that we should take more care to shape our lives in a way that creates the kind of history, biography, or character that we can be proud of. When asking, “Do I want to be him?” I am really asking whether I want to create the story of my life in that way, i.e., whether I want to construct my character in that fashion. When I discover untoward dispositions or a tendency toward vice, I must take care to train myself and put myself in situations that point in the right direction.

Character is disclosed in narrative, and narrative is retrospective. We live in the moving present and continually become ourselves. But as Hegel put it in *The Philosophy of Right*, “The owl of Minerva spreads her wings only at dusk.” Self-knowledge comes after the fact, at the end of the day, or at the end of life, when we look back upon what we’ve done and ask ourselves about the meaning and value of our activities. Life that is lived in the moving present involves a sort of uncertainty and incompleteness that can never be eradicated. We never know our own virtues and character until the end of the day.

But it is useful to imagine oneself from the perspective of the end of the day. And the use of third person pronouns helps us attain this perspective. When I ask, “Would I want to be a person like him?” I try to imagine myself as a spectator on my own life, as it were, from the perspective of the owl of Minerva. At the end of the day, what do I want my actions to look like? The question is future-oriented: What will my life look like at the end of the day? By projecting into the future in this way, in order to imagine what my own retrospective self-appraisal will be, the motivation for behaving well appears clear: I want to live well because I want my actions to be worthy of retrospective admiration.

The perspective I am aiming at here is indeed the “third person omniscient” point of view. It is very useful to adopt this point of view with regard to our own lives. We should think of each of our actions as part of the total narrative of our life. Each decision we make becomes a permanent part of our life story. Thus the heuristic question should be: “Do I want this moment to become part of the narrative whole which makes up my life story?” Perhaps this was what Nietzsche was aiming at when he spoke of the imagined heuristic of the eternal recurrence of the same and the ideal of *amor fati*: We

want to live in a way such that at the end of the day we can say to this day and this life, *da capo!*: That was a good day, lived well . . . let's do it again.

It is important that we stop to consider the "omniscient" aspect of the narrative account I am aiming at here. Omniscient narrators have access to the inner lives of their characters. An assessment of character in the moral sense requires interior access. It is not enough to know that a person behaves in such a way; we also need to know that the person was motivated by good intentions. As Aristotle put it, we must do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons. Now the same sort of third person omniscience is needed for an evaluation of my own actions. In thinking about whether "I would want to be him," I must imagine the total context that includes both external action and internal motivation and intention.

It is clear that there can be an overemphasis on the first person. Those who are egotistical, narcissistic, solipsistic, and self-absorbed might be said to be too caught up in the intensity of the first person. It is easy to think that the "I" is everything. The narcissistic person is only concerned with "I want" or "I need," and the egoist emphasizes "my" and "mine." Narcissism becomes dangerous and pathological when narcissistic self-absorption runs up against the indifference of the world beyond the self. The Golden Rule and other moral heuristics aim to combat the intensity of our commitment to life lived in the first person. These heuristics ask us to imagine the second person: to imagine ourselves in the place of the other, to relate the "I" to the "you" (or thou). And indeed, this is essential for cultivating altruism.

The perspective I am suggesting here asks us to describe our lives, including our desires and actions, in the third person: "He wants this" or "He is doing this." This may seem a very odd project at first. But it is a useful reminder of the point of view of virtue. The move toward the third person perspective can help us to overcome the intensity of life lived in the first person.

This move to the third person is not alien to the Western tradition of thinking about ethics. It is an essential move in Stoicism. Marcus Aurelius states, "No longer talk at all about the kind of man that a good man ought to be, but be such" (10.16). The point is to become the sort of person that you ought to be: the good man, who is guided by virtue and not by the whims of the "I." Essential to Stoicism is the idea of doing one's part within a whole governed by social and natural law. In his *Enchiridion*, Epictetus writes the following: "Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is as the playwright wants it to be: short if he wants it short, long if he wants it long. If he wants you to play a beggar, play even this part skillfully, or a cripple, or a

public official, or a private citizen. What is yours is to play the assigned part well. But to choose it belongs to someone else" (no. 17).

Epictetus's point is that we should deemphasize the wants and desires of the "I" and come to view our own lives as if we were playing a role. This is to adopt the third person point of view. The moral question from this point of view is not "What do I want?" or "How do I feel?" Nor is it "What do you want?" or "How would I like it if someone did that to me?" Rather, the question is "What does this role demand?" "What should a person of this sort want or feel?" or "How can I become that sort of person?"

Conclusion

This move to the third person may appear to involve some sort of psychological dissociation that involves confusion about pronouns. We live our lives in the first person, as it were. The self is an "I"; and "my" life is lived by "me." So it may seem perverse to think and speak of oneself in the third person. Indeed, it would be exceedingly strange to refer to oneself in conversation by using the third person. If I were to say to my wife in an intimate moment, "AF loves VF" (where AF and VF are our proper names), she would think I was either joking or crazy. The same is true in reports of other attitudes, desires, intentions, activities, etc. It would be odd for me to go about my day saying, "AF is hungry" or "AF wants pizza" or "AF has to teach this afternoon." And yet, despite their oddness, these expressions are perfectly meaningful: they do convey the right idea.

But thinking about oneself in the third person has an ethical advantage. It is a reminder that there is a perspective of our own lives that can be had from "the outside," as it were. The third person point of view helps us avoid the problem of fixing the referent of the "I." This problem arises when we take the problem of identity and time seriously. There is some further connection with Stoicism here. Marcus Aurelius, for example, was obsessed with the finitude of the moving present and the meaninglessness of the first person perspective when viewed from the expanse of eternity. When eternity overwhelms us, it is possible to imagine adopting a sort of "solipsism of the present moment" in which I exist only in the present. One can simply assert that the "I" of the present moment is the only thing that matters. From the point of view of the moving present, "my" actions are only the actions of "I-here-now." It is easy to succumb to the temptations of egoism when we focus only on "I-here-now."

I can continually dissociate myself from my past self. And it is possible even to imagine saying that "I am not AF," where I use the pronoun "I" to point to "me-here-now" in a way that is supposed to have no substantial connection to the life history that is indicated by the proper name "AF." In reality there are some cases of radical amnesia, when in fact I no longer identify myself in memory with my past self. And in the law there is the possibility of temporary insanity such that the acts committed by the legal person "AF" are not legitimately described as acts that "I" am responsible for. But in general, if we believe that there is identity over time, it is useful to think *not* in terms of "I" and "me" but rather in terms of impersonal pronouns like "he" or, even better, in terms of proper names like "AF."

The easiest way to resolve these sorts of problems of reference is to translate indexicals such as "I" and "you" into a language consisting only of proper names such as "AF." In this way, we might argue that the social world itself consists of the actions of persons that can be identified in this way. Pronouns are convenient abbreviations for locutions that identify the actions of those persons who are named by proper nouns. In this sense, the expression "AF loves VF" has the same meaning as "I love you." Indeed, it might be preferred to use proper names since this removes ambiguity. After all, when saying "I love you" I might mean "you" in a way that is not the same as "VF."

Of course there are obvious problems with reducing first and second person claims to the third person. Perspective is eliminated. And our language becomes cumbersome and impersonal. I would not want to argue, however, that we should do away with this sort of language. Rather, I believe the move to the third person is a useful heuristic device which can help us attain the point of view of virtue ethics. The virtue account holds that an evaluation of "my" actions or "my" character is not simply a matter of "my" perspective and the whims of "I-here-now." Rather, my actions in the present become a permanent part of my character such that what "I" do now will forever be part of what "AF" has done. Recognizing this can help us think more carefully about our actions. I must continually ask myself if "I" want to become "AF," that is, I must ask myself if I want to be him, if I want to be that sort of person.

The third person point of view thus reminds me that my own life soon enough does come to be described in a "third person" sort of way. Others—the law, the IRS, my family, etc.—will always describe my actions using either my proper name or the pronoun "he." Moreover, my own present actions will become for me the permanent record of my past actions. In this way,

my own identity slips beyond the “I” and soon enough become the actions of a sort of “he.” Of course, there is an identity claim here: that the “he” of my past is identical with the “I” of the present. But virtue ethics emphasizes the fact that my past self is carried with me wherever I go: my past self is my character, which will be the focal point of moral evaluation at the end of the day. I am trailed through life by “him,” by the actions of “AF” in the past. In this way, one could argue, each decision I make has a sort of eternal or timeless significance—it becomes a fixture in my history which can never be erased. Thus, when we adopt the third person perspective in describing our actions, we can see how important it is to live well: so as to create the kind of person whose history and character are admirable. At the end of the day I want to be able to say, “Yes—I’m glad to have been him.”

NOTES

1. The problem of gender is one that I will not be able to address in the present paper. For now, I will simply use “him” in order to avoid the extra verbiage of the phrase “him or her.” It is possible for the question to be articulated in a genderless fashion: “How would you like to be X or Y?” (where X or Y are proper names). This formulation attempts to avoid the confusion that can arise from using ambiguous pronouns. But I want to retain the use of pronouns to keep the question more in line with the pronouns used in the Golden Rule. I will say more about the problem of pronouns subsequently.

2. Kant, *Fundamental Principles*, sec.2n14:

Let it not be thought that the common “*quod tibi non vis fieri*, etc.” could serve here as the rule or principle. For it is only a deduction from the former, though with several limitations; it cannot be a universal law, for it does not contain the principle of duties to oneself, nor of the duties of benevolence to others (for many a one would gladly consent that others should not benefit him, provided only that he might be excused from showing benevolence to them), nor finally that of duties of strict obligation to one another, for on this principle the criminal might argue against the judge who punishes him, and so on.

3. I discuss moral imagination in “Toleration and the Limits of the Moral Imagination.” This essay is revised and reprinted in Fiala, *Tolerance and the Ethical Life*.

4. Hare, “Abortion and the Golden Rule.” Hare’s article is, I think, a neglected gem in the abortion debate. He offers a useful reply to Tooley and Thomson, while also showing us how Golden Rule arguments would have to work in this context. Hare’s article might appear to be similar to Marquis’ article, “Why Abortion is Immoral.” But Hare more clearly focuses us on the judgment of whether we are glad to have been born.

5. This question has been considered by many, for example, Singer. For a critical discussion of the eugenic implications of this sort of question, see Shakespeare.

6. I discuss this problem in *What Would Jesus Really Do?*

7. See: MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. For a more recent discussion, see Kochin.

8. For a critical discussion of Doris and Harman, see Zeller.

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