

# The Golden Rule

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**Hinduism:** This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)



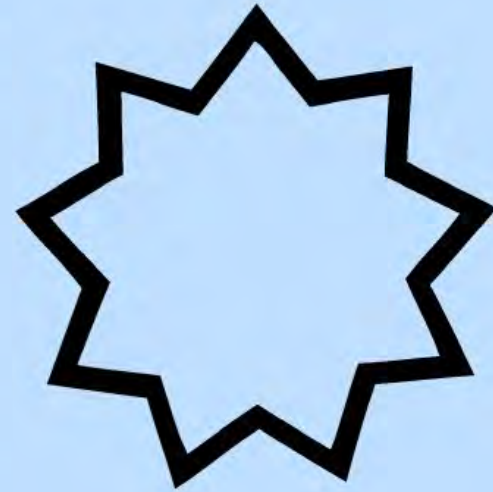
**Judaism:** What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)



**Christianity:** In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Jesus, Matthew 7:12)



**Baha'i Faith:** Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.  
(Baha'u'lláh, Gleanings)



# Breaking down the Golden Rule

- German philosopher **Hans Reiner** (1896-1991) published research on the Golden Rule for thirty years: 1948, 1964, and 1977
- Reiner identified
  - specific moral principles that constitute the Rule



# 1. principle of sympathetic projection

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1. the *Einfühlungsregel* or “principle of sympathetic projection”

- Put yourself in someone else’s shoes

(See Lisa Aziz-Zadeh’s research on mirror neurons and empathy)



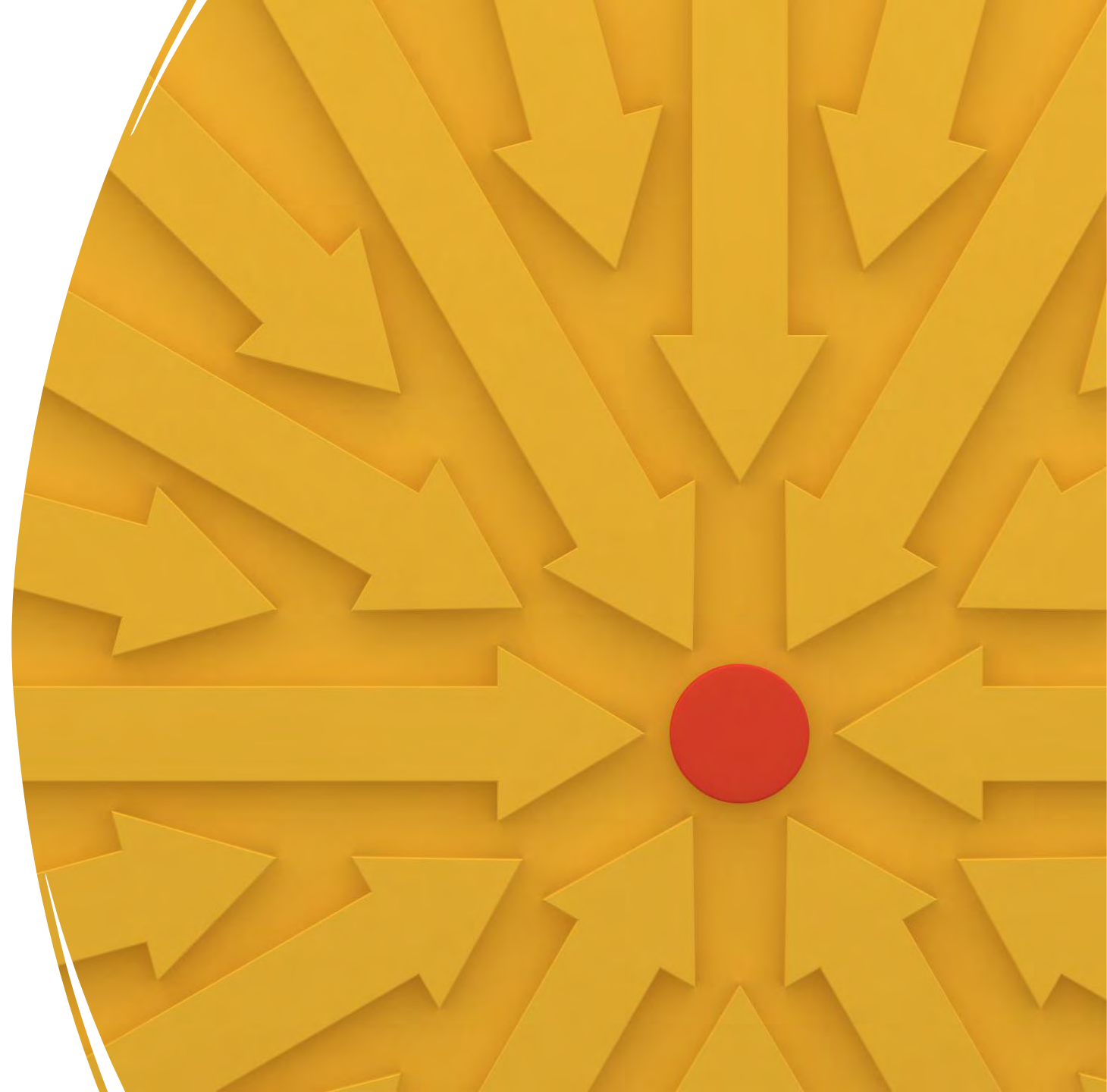
## 2. principle of autonomous judgment

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### 2. the *Autonomieregel* “principle of autonomous judgment”

- “autonomous” in the sense of self-evident
- Anyone can see and judge your actions

*(see Joshua Greene’s fMRI-based studies on the Trolley Problem)*





# 3. principle of reciprocity

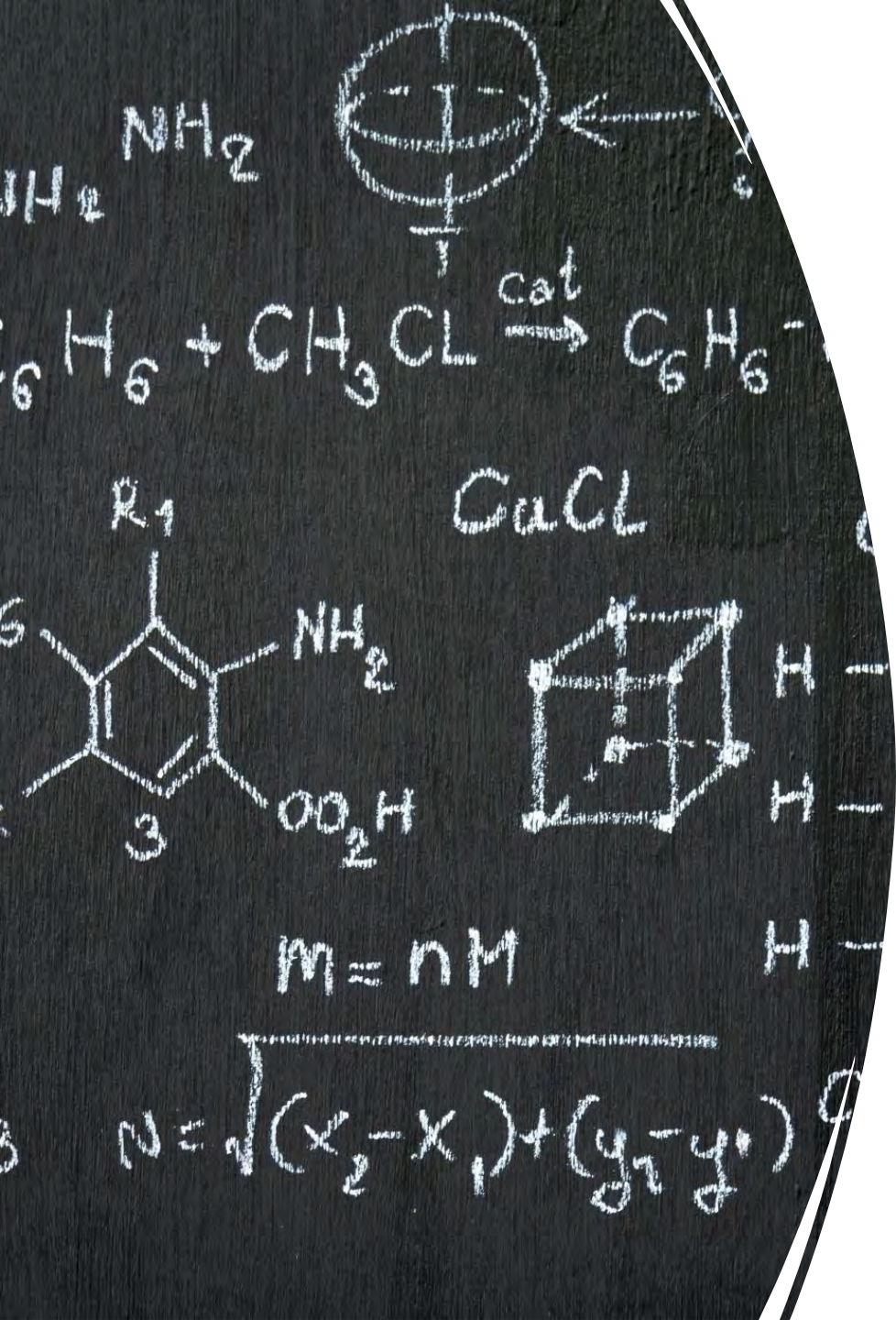
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3. the *Rückbezüglichkeitsregel* “principle of reflexivity” or “principle of reciprocity”

The Golden Rule calculates that the other person will, if treated in a particular manner, react in kind.

- The idea comes close to a principle of retribution, but different because retribution is reactive, reciprocity is anticipatory

(see Robert Axelrod’s computer modeling of tit-for-tat strategies)



# 4. principle of risk

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- The Golden Rule involves the very real risk that your actions will not be reciprocated.
- Risk-taking is constitutive of any moral action.

*(see Lara Buchak's work on the role of risk in rational choice games)*



# Lingering questions: Is there a difference between the positive and the negative formulation?

- Negative formulation: **abstain from action**
  - Didache 1.2 “And whatever you do not want to happen to you, do not do to another.”
- Positive formulation: **take initiative**
  - Matt 7:12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”
  - Luke 6:31 “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

# Lingering questions: Is the Golden Rule restrictive or expansive?

- Restrictive
  - Do to others *only* what you would have them do to you
- Expansive
  - Do to others *everything* that you would have them do to you



# Lingering questions: Is the Golden Rule the pinnacle of moral progress?

- **Albrecht Dihle** (1923-2020) speculates on the historical evolution of the Golden Rule:
  - Human groups begin with indiscriminate blood revenge →
  - → calculated retribution and compensatory punishment ( *ius talionis*, the “law of retaliation” ) →
  - → the Golden Rule, negatively stated →
  - → the Golden Rule, first positively expressed by Jesus

## Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle*

*“Beginning to reason is like stepping onto an escalator that leads upward and out of sight. Once we take the first step, the distance to be traveled is independent of our will and we cannot know in advance where we shall end.”*

