A Rational Plea for The Golden Rule

No matter what he said Thomas Jefferson was not a regenerate Christian according to any historical standard of orthodoxy within the Christian church. This is simply true based on the fact that historical Christian orthodoxy requires a belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the one and only God/man. When Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58) he was clearly asserting the fact that He was and is eternally divine as well as human.

"To the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed, opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other." (1803 April 21. Letter of Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush).

Thomas Jefferson was a great enlightenment thinker and along with the Puritan rooted John Adams they were the principal architects of the American Republic. Jefferson admired the teaching of Jesus.

"I too have made a wee little book, from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus. It is a paradigma of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen. It is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel… (1816 January 9. Letter of Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson).

"The Golden Rule"

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.   Jesus, Luke 6:31 KJV

Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.   Jesus, Luke 6:31 NASB

Game Theory

A set of concepts aimed at decision making in situations of competition and conflict (as well as of cooperation and interdependence) under specified rules. Game theory employs games of strategy (such as chess) but not of chance (such as rolling a dice). A strategic game represents a situation where two or more participants are faced with choices of action, by which each may gain or lose, depending on what others choose to do or not to do. The final outcome of a game, therefore, is determined jointly by the strategies chosen by all participants. These are also situations of uncertainty because no participant knows for sure what the other participants are going to decide.

What is game theory?

Game theory is the formal study of conflict and cooperation. Game theoretic concepts apply whenever the actions of several agents are interdependent. These agents may be individuals, groups, firms, or any combination of these. The concepts of game theory provide a language to formulate, structure, analyze, and understand strategic scenarios.

A Few Selected Definitions from within Game Theory for an elementary understanding:

Zero-sum game
A game is said to be zero-sum if for any outcome, the sum of the payoffs to all players is zero. In a two-player zero-sum game, one player's gain is the other player's loss, so their interests are diametrically opposed.

Example: The stock market

Rationality

A player is said to be rational if he seeks to play in a manner which maximizes his own payoff. It is often assumed that the rationality of all players is common knowledge.

Payoff
A payoff is a number, also called utility, that reflects the desirability of an outcome to a player, for whatever reason. When the outcome is random, payoffs are usually weighted with their probabilities. The expected payoff incorporates the player's attitude towards risk.

Nash equilibrium
A Nash equilibrium, also called strategic equilibrium, is a list of strategies, one for each player, which has the property that no player can unilaterally change his strategy and get a better payoff.

Ignore the Blonde

John Nash was portrayed in the movie "A Beautiful Mind" by Russell Crowe. While at University Nash was looking for a fresh insight into economic theory. According to the film, one evening Nash and four male friends were in a bar when a blonde woman entered with four brunette women. All five of the men were attracted to the blonde and one of them, not Nash, put forth the theory of economist Adam Smith that each man should try to succeed in direct competition with the others in trying to capture the attention of the blonde, or to "get the blonde."

After a flash of inspiration, Nash said that the best collective result will not come from each man following his own interest, but rather by each man approaching a brunette. This would produce a better result for the group.

Nash reasoned as follows: "If we all go for the blonde, we block each other and not a single one of us is going to get her. So then we would go for her friends, but they will all give us the cold shoulder because nobody likes to be second choice. But what if no one goes for the blonde? We don't get in each other's way and we don't insult the other girls. That's the only way we win."

Nash implicitly suggested here that aiming at a brunette is surely successful and that getting a brunette is better than getting no girl at all. It is also understood that anyone will get the blonde as long as he is the only one approaching her. Finally, Nash assumes that if several guys approach the blonde simultaneously, they would end up getting no girl at all.

When Nash wrote his Ph.D. thesis in 1950, "Non Cooperative Games" at Princeton University, the dissertation was brief. It ran only 26 pages. His dissertation won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1994.

Example: Prisoner's Dilemma

The story behind the name "Prisoner's Dilemma" is that of two prisoners held suspect of a serious crime. There is no judicial evidence for this crime except if one of the prisoners testifies against the other. If one of them testifies, he will be rewarded with immunity from prosecution (payoff 3), whereas the other will serve a long prison sentence (payoff 0). If both testify, their punishment will be less severe (payoff 1 for each). However, if they both "cooperate" with each other by not testifying at all, they will only be imprisoned briefly, for example for illegal weapons possession (payoff 2 for each). The "defection" from that mutually beneficial outcome is to testify, which gives a higher payoff no matter what the other prisoner does, with a resulting lower payoff to both. This constitutes their "dilemma."

The Prisoner's Dilemma is a game in strategic form between two players. Each player has two strategies, called "cooperate" and "defect," which are labeled C and D for player I and c and d for player II, respectively. (For simpler identification, upper case letters are used for strategies of player I and lower case letters for player II.)

Figure 1. The Prisoner's Dilemma game.

Figure 1 shows the resulting payoffs in this game. Player I chooses a row, either C or D, and simultaneously player II chooses one of the columns c or d. The strategy combination (C; c) has payoff 2 for each player, and the combination (D; d) gives each player payoff 1. The combination (C; d) results in payoff 0 for player I and 3 for player II, and when (D; c) is played, player I gets 3 and player II gets 0.

In layman's terms it all goes something like this. Let us presume that two merchants who sell similar items are in competition on the same corner or two streets. If they both cooperate with each other as competitors, for instance, they both stock quality goods at fair prices and perhaps even send customers to each other to find what they are seeking, They will both earn of profit of "2," perhaps $2,000 a week or a month. If one of them "defects" and betrays the other, then his profits will rise to around "3." And the other may make close to nothing. The defector might cut prices drastically in an attempt to run the other merchant out of business and/or stock much inferior goods. This will force the other merchant to defect as well and they will both make a profit of about "1." Then they are both worse off only making half the profit that they made at the beginning. If they meet and purpose to cooperate again their profits will probably double again in time as customers are convinced that they have changed their ways. This scenario has been proven right again and again in actual practice. Nash proved that Adam Smith's theory was not correct.

Another example from the movies is found in "Miracle on 34th Street." In this film the Christmas Santa at Macy's begins sending customers to Gimbel's when they cannot find the article at Macys. At first this is taken as a betrayal of Macy's but the customers are so happy that it actually causes much more sales at Macy's. In turn Mr. Gimbel instructs his employees to reciprocate and both stores do even better.

Another example can been seen in the growth of the university system in Europe between the years 1,000A.D. and 2,000 A.D. The first universities were started by the patronage of the King. The European kings each started one university which then had a monopoly on higher education. However, in England the king supported two universities, Oxford and Cambridge.

These universities had sports teams which competed in games as friendly competitors. The students would shout things like, "good play" or "well done" to the opposing side. England was always a little different than the rest of Europe because of the isolation provided by the English Channel.

When the English model came to America it was English "on steroids." Cooperative competition abounded. Now you often see a McDonalds across the street from Burger King. They both do well because Nash's Equilibrium prevails.

We should ask ourselves, why does it work so well. It is because of human nature. Little by little natural man has learned that cooperation is the better way for everybody and that self-serving greed usually leads to no good. By hard experience mankind learns that God's way is better even if God is not mentioned or even known to the cooperative competitors.
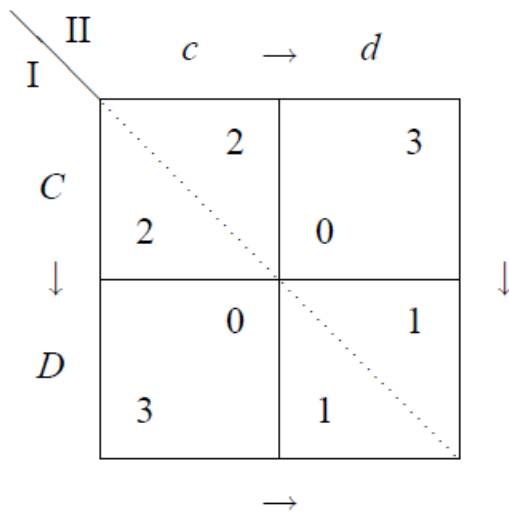

Figure 2. The game of Figure 1 with annotations, implied by the payoff structure.

This figure merely represents, by the arrows, how the situation can change over time as explained above.

The dotted line shows the symmetry of the game. The arrows at the left and right point to the preferred strategy of player I when player II plays the left or right column, respectively. Similarly, the arrows at the top and bottom point to the preferred strategy of player II when player I plays top or bottom.
In the Prisoner's Dilemma game, "defect" is a strategy that dominates "cooperate."
Strategy D of player I dominates C since if player II chooses c, then player I's payoff is 3 when choosing D and 2 when choosing C; if player II chooses d, then player I receives 1

for *D* as opposed to 0 for *C*. These preferences of player I are indicated by the downward pointing arrows in Figure 2. Hence, *D* is indeed always better and dominates *C*. In the same way, strategy *d* dominates *c* for player II.

No rational player will choose a dominated strategy since the player will always be better off when changing to the strategy that dominates it. The unique outcome in this game, as recommended to utility-maximizing players, is therefore (*D; d*) with payoffs (1*;* 1). Somewhat paradoxically, this is less than the payoff (2*;* 2) that would be achieved when the players chose (*C; c*).

Historic example:
Chamberlain and Hitler

"In 1938, Prime Minister Chamberlain signed the Munich Pact with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, giving Czechoslovakia over to German conquest but bringing, as Chamberlain promised, "peace in our time." In September 1939, that peace was shattered by Hitler's invasion of Poland. Chamberlain declared war against Germany but during the next eight months showed himself to be ill-equipped for the daunting task of saving Europe from Nazi conquest. After British forces failed to prevent the German occupation of Norway in April 1940, Chamberlain lost the support of many members of his Conservative Party. On May 10, Hitler invaded Holland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The same day, Chamberlain formally lost the confidence of the House of Commons." Then Winston Churchill became the Prime Minister.

The result was Germany in ruins, London in ruins, millions die between 1939 and 1945.
Hitler was not rational because he was not sane. On the (usual) negative side,
Hitler was not rational because he was not sane. The Sin nature makes people not sane. The more degenerate a person is the more insane he is.

The Story of The Turtle And The Scorpion

There is an old story told in Greek mythology about the turtle and the scorpion. The scorpion cannot swim, so he asked the turtle to carry him across a river on his back. The turtle refused and said, "When we are in the midst of the river you will sting me and we will both die." The scorpion responded, "I will not sting you. That would be insane. I need you to get me to the other side of the river. Would I kill myself as well?" So the turtle saw the reasonableness of that and took the scorpion on his back to cross the river. When they were about halfway across the river the scorpion stung the turtle. The turtle asked, "Why did you sting me? Now we will both die." The scorpion answered, "I could not help it. It is my nature."

It is the nature of unredeemed man to act contrary of his own best interests. That is unreasonable. The sin nature is unreasonable. It will act according to its nature. This is the one thing that secular humanism in all of its many forms cannot comprehend. Man will not of his own free admit that he is insane because of sin. But sometimes he can learn the lesson of the Prisoner's Dilemma game and cooperate for his own benefit. This proves that the Golden Rule is

best for all. Furthermore, either hard experience or true spiritual enlightenment, Christian regeneration, will cause us to practice the Golden Rule in this life.

But I Will Show You A Mystery

A new Christian perspective. What Is Rational? What is Irrational?
God is not rational according to human standards, but He has infinite resources. Therefore, rational by His own standards. Since He is sufficient in Himself. He has no personal need to win as a "player in the game." Since Christian believers have access to God's own resources they do not have to win in a game with mortals.

Matthew 22: 37-40.

37 And He (Jesus) said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

38 This is the great and foremost commandment.

39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." NASB

Luke 6: 27-36

27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
29 Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.
30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.
31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.
32 If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them.
33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same.
34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*.

35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. NASB