

The golden rule (GR), “Treat others as you want to be treated,” is common to most religions and cultures of the world.

**The old man and  
his grandson  
(The wooden bowl)**

*Switching places:  
Imagine your action  
being done to you.*





My GR formula

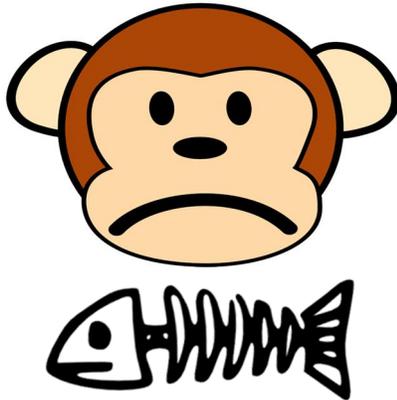


Don't combine these



- I do something to another.
- I'm unwilling that this be done to me in the same situation.

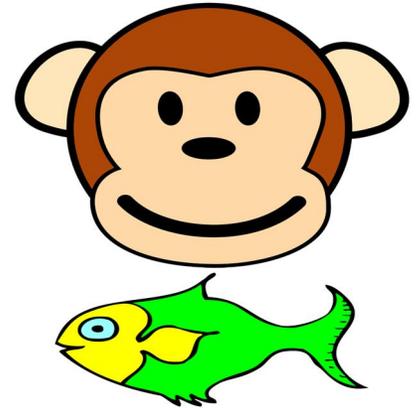
(1) The **literal GR fallacy** assumes that everyone has the same likes, dislikes, and needs that we have.



The foolish GR monkey, wanting to be taken from the flood waters himself, took the fish from the flood waters.

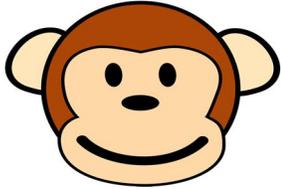
# GR needs a same-situation qualifier.

Kita, the wise GR monkey,  
tried to *know* about the fish and  
*imagine* herself in his exact place.  
Then she asked this question:

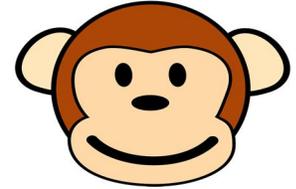


Am I now willing that if I were  
in the same situation as the fish,  
then I be taken from the water?

“Gosh no:  
this would  
kill me!”



using GR wisely (Kita)



- K. **Know**: “How would my action affect others?”
- I. **Imagine**: “What would it be like to have this done to me in the same situation?”
- T. **Test** for consistency: “Am I now willing that if I were in the same situation then this be done to me?”
- A. **Act** toward others only as you’re willing to be treated in the same situation.

(2) The **soft GR fallacy** assumes that we should never act against what others want.



Baby squirrel Willy  
wants to put his fingers  
into electrical outlets.  
Does GR let us stop him?

Am I now willing that if I were in  
Willy's situation then I be stopped from  
putting my fingers in electrical outlets?

“Sure!”

(3) The **doormat GR fallacy** assumes that we should ignore our own interests.



Frazzled Frannie thinks GR makes us never say no, even to unreasonable requests.

But hey, I'm willing that others say no to me in similar circumstances!

(4) The **third-parties GR fallacy** assumes that we should consider only ourselves and the other person.



Pre-law Lucy asks: “Please give me an undeserved A so I can get into law school!”

If our act affects X, Y, and Z, then we must be willing that it be done if we were in the place of X or in the place of Y or in the place of Z.

(5) The **easy GR fallacy** assumes that GR gives an infallible test of right and wrong that takes only seconds to apply.



Electra thinks electrical shocks are pleasurable.

Rich thinks his workers live well on \$1 a day.



To lead reliably to right action, GR needs to build on knowledge and imagination.



If you're conscientious and impartial,  
then you won't make Grandpa eat apart  
unless you're willing that you be made  
to eat apart in the same situation.

You make  
Grandpa  
eat apart

→  
conscientious

You believe it would  
be all right for you to  
make Grandpa eat apart

↓ impartial

You're willing  
that you be made  
to eat apart in the  
same situation

←  
conscientious

You believe it would  
be all right for you to  
be made to eat apart  
in the same situation

“So always treat others as you want to be treated, for this sums up the Law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12) and “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

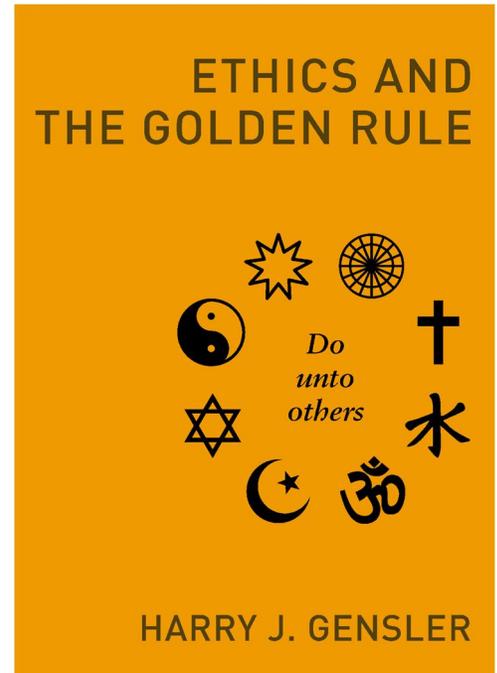


Many Christian thinkers over the ages have seen GR as somehow central to the moral law that is “written on the human heart” (Romans 2:15).

For more on GR:

<http://www.harryhiker.com/gr>

or my 2013 Routledge book →



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Wade Chair Talk, by Harry J. Gensler, S.J.,  
at Marquette University, April 8, 2014.