

Is the golden rule (“Treat others as you want to be treated”) gold or garbage?



Jesus, Confucius, and Hillel gave the golden rule as their summary of how to live.

But most academics ignore the rule, thinking that it's unclear and full of problems.



The literal golden rule

If you want X to do something to you,
then do this same thing to X.



*this leads to
absurdities*



different situations

If you want Dr. Davis to
remove your appendix,
then remove her appendix.

flawed desires

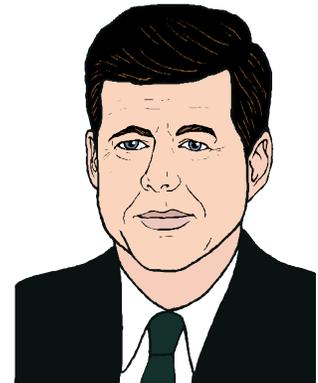
If you want others
to hate you, then
hate them.

Gensler's GR

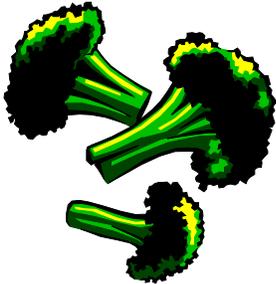
Treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation.

GR forbids this combination:

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



GR involves imagining yourself
in the other person's place.

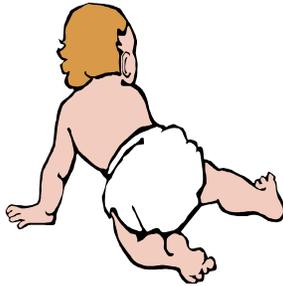


I'm a waiter who hates broccoli;
so I don't want it served to me. If
I follow GR, can I serve broccoli
to a customer who ordered it?

Ask this →

Am I now willing that if I
were in the same situation
then this be done to me?

GR involves a present attitude toward a hypothetical situation.



Little Will puts his finger into electrical outlets. Does GR let us discipline him?

Ask this →

Am I now willing that if I
were in the same situation
then this be done to me?

GR forbids an inconsistent action-desire combination. Satisfying GR-consistency doesn't guarantee that your action is right.

“I grow rich with my coal mine while paying my workers only \$1 a day.”



The owner (ignorant of what \$1 can buy) is willing that he be paid \$1 in his workers' place. It doesn't follow that his act is right.



If you're conscientious and impartial,
then you won't steal Detra's bicycle
unless you're willing that your bicycle
be stolen in the same situation:

You steal
Detra's
bicycle

→
conscientious

You believe it would
be all right for you
to steal her bicycle

↓ impartial

You're willing
that your bicycle
be stolen in the
same situation

←
conscientious

You believe it would
be all right for your
bicycle to be stolen
in the same situation

The golden rule: *procedure (KITA)*

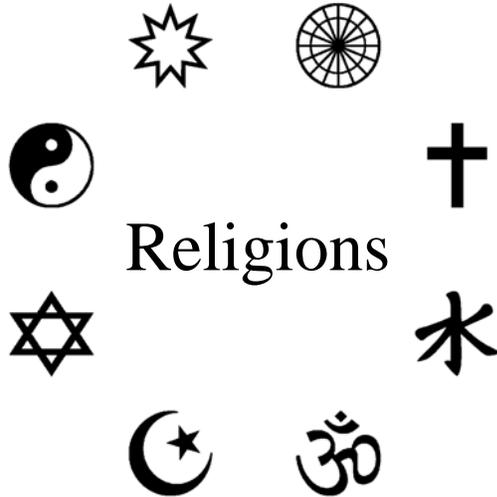
1. Know: “How would my action affect others?”
2. Imagine: “What would it be like to have this done to me?”
3. Test for consistency: “Am I now willing that if I were in the same situation then this be done to me?”
4. Act toward others only as you’re willing to be treated in the same situation.



The love norm: *motivation*

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Seek to do good and not harm to others, *and do this for their own sake.*)

GR can be embedded in different frameworks



Religions

Philosophies

intuitionism
emotivism
cultural relativism
supernaturalism
utilitarianism
egoism ...

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October 18, 2010

<http://www.jcu.edu/philosophy/gensler/goldrule.htm>