

Chapter 1

What Is the Golden Rule of Ethics?



Mais comme tout est compensé dans
le meilleur des mondes possibles.¹

Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris.²

First of all, the essence of the Golden Rule is elucidated. Then its connections with philosophy, morality, duty, ethics, and politics are considered.

1.1 Scribitur ad narrandum, non ad probandum³

Do as you would be done by.
—English proverb⁴

The negative and positive statements of the Golden Rule are identified and its history is traced back [36–40].

¹French “There are doubts whether everything is really compensated in the best of all possible worlds”; from A.I. Herzen’s letter to N.A. Herzen, June 7, 1851. An ironic combination of two famous quotes from *Des compensations dans les destinées humaines* by French philosopher P.H. Azaïs (1766–1845) and *Candide* by French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778).

²Latin “Do not do unto others what you don’t want others to do unto you.” A favourite phrase of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexandrus (222–235 A.D.).

³Latin “Is written to narrate, not to prove.” A quote from *Institute of Oratory* X: 1, 13, by Roman rhetorian Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (appr. 35–95). He used this phrase to discriminate between the tasks of history and eloquence.

⁴Considered by many ethicists and moralists, not only Christians, as a foundation of proper behavior. The world would be almost ideal if everybody obeyed this proverb.

In fact, the idea of this book occurred spontaneously, like those of many books dedicated to cybernetics. Our motivation emanated from the plenary lecture “The Golden Rule of ethics,” delivered by RAS Academician A. Guseinov⁵ on October 10, 2014, during the opening session of the IX Moscow Festival of Science in the fundamental library of Moscow State University. In the early 1970s, Guseinov was the first Russian philosopher to pioneer research on the Golden Rule [34, 35]. Epigraph no. 2 represents the quintessence of this rule in its negative statement. However, there exists a positive statement, “Behave unto others as you would like them to behave unto you.”

The Golden Rule of ethics is not only a topic of academic studies, but also a subject of contemplation for any thinking person (even if he forgets this rule or simply does not realize its role in everyday life). The Golden Rule was suggested by prominent sages in ancient times. It still remains topical in our days. This rule dates back to the middle of the first millennium B.C., a period of humanistic revolution. The Golden status was assigned to it in the eighteenth century.

As is well known, in tribal communities people followed the custom of blood vengeance called talion (the law of retribution in kind). This severe law restricted the wars of tribes through an equivalent punishment for any crime. When tribal relations started to disappear, it became difficult to discriminate between “friends” and “foes.” The economic relations beyond a community had gradually become more significant than family ties. As a result, communities strived to bear no responsibility for the actions of individual members. That processes made the use of talion inefficient, and communities needed a fundamentally new principle to regulate interpersonal relations regardless of tribal membership. The solution was provided by the Golden Rule.

1.2 World Religions About the Golden Rule

Those who cannot remember the
past are condemned to repeat it.
—Santayana⁶

⁵Abdusalam A. Guseinov, RAS Academician and Director of RAS Institute of Philosophy. Formulated the hypothesis about the phased origin of ethics based on the isolation of an individual from a tribal community as an active person. Has been developing the concept of non-violence ethics since the late 1980s. Associated with a series of original ideas, namely, an interpretation of the classical European ethics as different experiences in the spiritual overcoming of contradictions between happiness (bliss) and goodness (virtue); a justified consideration of ethics and moral reasoning as a single spiritual complex that lies outside the framework of science and its subject; a description of moralizing as a fetishistic form of cognition. In the recent years, has been working on an ethical concept that substantiates a particular role of bans and negative actions in morality.

⁶Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, well-known in the English speaking world as George Santayana, (1863–1952), was a Spanish-American philosopher, poet, and humanist who made important contributions to aesthetics, speculative philosophy, and literary criticism.

The original statements of the Golden Rule from leading world religions are presented.

Let us discuss the statements of the Golden Rule that can be found in ancient religions.

The New Testament, see *the Gospel of Matthew*, Chapter 7:12: “Therefore **all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:** for this is the law and the prophets.”

The New Testament, see *the Gospel of Luke*, Chapter 6:31: “And **as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.**”

The Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a: “Once there was a gentile who came before Shammai, and said to him: “Convert me on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.” Shammai pushed him aside with the measuring stick he was holding. The same fellow came before Hillel, and Hillel converted him, saying: “**That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow,** this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary, go and learn it.”

An earliest mention of the Golden Rule can be found in the Old Testament, see *The Book of Tobit*, Chapter 4:14–15. Tobit exhorts his son Tobias, “Be careful, my child, in all you do, well-disciplined in all your behaviour. **Do to no one what you would not want done to you.**” Most of modern biblical scholars date *The Book of Tobit* to a period between the fifth and third centuries B.C.

The same (or even earlier) period is assigned to the teachings of Confucius, see *The Analects (Lun Yu)*, Chapter XV, 24: “Zi Gong [a disciple] asked: “Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life?” The Master replied: “How about ‘reciprocity’! **Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.**”

Similar statements also appeared in old Indian and Muslim texts. A saying of the Buddha reads, “**As one teaches others so should one do oneself**” (see *Dhammapada* XII: 159). A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad states, “None of you has faith until he **loves for his brother what he loves for himself**” (see Hadith 13 in *Forty Hadith An-Nawawi*).

Of course, we should also mention numerous modern statements, from “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” to “reciprocal altruism.” Modern ethologists believe that reciprocal altruism is the result of human evolution from natural egoism.

Without going deep into the history of the Golden Rule (time, place and origin), let us emphasize **the fundamental difference between the statements in the New and Old Testaments.** Many regard these statements as identical and even think that the Golden Rule appeared in the New Testament from the Old. Despite superficial resemblance, they have different, one might say, opposite sense. In the New Testament, the statement of the Golden Rule is positive: **do** to others what is good for you. But good for us does not always mean good for others. On the other hand, the Old Testament suggests the negative statement: **do not** do to others what is bad for you. Following this principle, one never does evil to anybody, even to an unknown person. This principle is more universal and well-grounded in relations with akins and friends as well as with strangers.

1.3 The Golden Rule and Philosophy

Philosophy is the science
which considers truth.
—Aristotle⁷

The connection between the Golden Rule and philosophy is considered.

Interestingly, the Golden Rule of ethics can be also found in philosophy. **Thales of Miletus**, the first among the seven famous Greek sages and philosophers, answered the question “What method must we take to lead a good life?” in the following way: “To do nothing we would condemn in others.” Aurelius Augustinus (St. Augustine), a philosopher and theologian of the fourth to fifth centuries A.D., wrote, “The rule of love is that one should wish his friend to have all the good things he wants to have himself, and should not wish the evils to befall his friend which he wishes to avoid himself” (see *Of True Religions*, Chapter XLVI).

Thomas Hobbes, an outstanding philosopher of the New Time, noted, “. . . yet to leave all men unexcusable, they [natural laws] have been contracted into one easie sum, intelligible even to the meanest capacity; and that is, “Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe” (see *Leviathan*, Chapter XV).

Finally, **Lev Tolstoy** quoted the Golden Rule in his *What Is Religion, of What is Its Essence?* in the following way: “The truths of the religion common to everyone today are so very simple, intelligible and close to the hearts of all men; the practical law of which is that **man must behave towards others as he would wish others to behave towards him.**”

Many other thinkers also mentioned the Golden Rule in certain form. The greatest sages on the Earth that are generally recognized as the teachers of mankind underlined the crucial role of this rule in human life. Possibly, to a large extent this was the core of their wisdom.

Let us summarize the Golden Rule in its conventional statements. These statements reflect the common basis of the rule as well as its nuances.

1. **Sympathy rule:** “Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself” (this statement goes back to Confucius).
2. **Autonomy rule:** “Do nothing you would condemn in others” (this statement goes back to Thales of Miletus).
3. **Reciprocity rule:** “As you would that men should do to you, do also to them likewise” (this statement goes back to the Gospels).

Essentially, all these rules are suggesting the same. A common feature is that, while making a decision in complicated or ambiguous situations, a man should be guided by his beliefs, assessments and desires regarding the best relations among the people.

⁷Aristotle, Greek Aristoteles, (384–322 B.C.), was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist. One of the greatest intellectual figures of Western history.

Summarizing this historical review, we also note that the Rule figured as an aphorism, fundamental principle, commandment, etc. *In the seventeenth century it was called Golden in the European culture and still exists under this name.* True, the Golden Rule of ethics is also associated with other statements. Some philosophers tried to suggest a “metallic family” of ethical rules. For instance, American theologian and church historian Leonard I. Sweet introduced the following system of rules.

1. “Do unto others before they do unto you.” (**The Iron Rule**).
2. “Do unto others as they do unto you.” (**The Silver Rule**).
3. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (**The Golden Rule**).

In addition, he formulated **the Titanium Rule**: “do unto others as Jesus has done to us.” Here the key principles are selflessness and self-sacrifice.

1.4 What Does the Golden Rule Suggest?

We know the truth, not only by
the reason, but also by the heart.
—Pascal⁸

The essence of the Golden Rule is emphasized and its intended use is described.

What does the Golden Rule suggest? From what comprehension of human nature does it stem? This model relies on the following hypotheses.

1. Every man is the cause of all his deeds: before doing anything, every man makes a corresponding decision. This, of course, does not imply the absence of exogenous determinative factors, as they do exist; but the behavior of every man is conscious and reasonable and all his deeds are the result of his own decisions.
2. Every man strives for good, that is, best deeds according to his beliefs (particularly, best deeds for himself).
3. Best deeds are the deeds of intrinsic value, i.e., they will never turn into evil for the man performing them. Best deeds yield internal rewards and no man will regret them.
4. The deeds of intrinsic value remain such for any man striving for good. This hypothesis is of crucial importance. In other words, whenever a man finds a best decision within his reasoning-based ethical aspiration, this decision will be acknowledged by every man who follows the principles of good and rational argumentation.

⁸Blaise Pascal, (1623–1662), was a French mathematician, physician, religious figure, and writer.

The Golden Rule is a mechanism that allows every man to answer the following question in any ambiguous situations. Are seemingly valuable deeds of real value? Am I mistaken?

What are the intended use and capabilities of the Golden Rule?

The Golden Rule cannot change an immoral man into moral one. In fact, this task seems impossible for any rule. The intended use of the Golden Rule is to assist every man who strives to act ethically in keeping self-respect, i.e., choosing a correct decision. The Golden Rule is not a requirement applied to others. In the first place, it is imposed on oneself. Not coincidentally the linguistic form of the Golden Rule has two moods, namely,

1. imperative (“do”–“do not”) and
2. subjunctive (“would”–“would not”).

Imperativeness concerns one’s own deeds while subjunctiveness the deeds of others. That is, we should be judgemental about our own deeds. For the deeds of the others, we may only hope and lead them by our own example.

In an ambiguous situation, the Golden Rule calls to mobilize imagination and carry out a mental experiment, exchanging roles in order to assess the relative significance (ergo, ethical purity) of a prospective deed. This approach allows one to remove all doubts and make a responsible and judgemental decision.

The Golden Rule of ethics is not an abstract norm. On the contrary, it is very specific and applicable to real situations, doubts, temptations, or enticements. People do not need special training or skills to use this rule, as it is not a logical formula but a **working scheme of behavior**. Everybody knows and recognizes this rule because it is present in our experience.

We resort to the Golden Rule while trying to deter another man from a bad deed. In short, the Golden Rule of ethics is a fundamental principle of our everyday life based on morality.

In conclusion, we note that some researchers endeavor to overcome the Golden Rule, belittling its importance as the quintessence of ethics, and suggest alternative regulation rules for moral behavior. Here a widespread approach is the Platinum Rule introduced by American culturologist Milton J. Bennett, which states, “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.” Russian culturologist Mikhail N. Epstein proposed the Diamond Rule in the following form: “Act in such a way that you yourself would like to become an object of your actions but no one else could be their subject.” In other words, “Do what others need and no one else can do in your place.” Both rules emphasize some autonomy for the ethical aspect of any action, i.e., it is assumed that each man has to simulate ambiguous situations in his mind, like a game played with himself. No doubt, these statements are important and reflect crucial points of our moral life, but still do not overcome the Golden Rule of ethics: the Platinum and Diamond Rules lose reciprocity. Indeed, according to the Golden Rule, each man should behave taking into account the expected effect on other people. Following the Platinum or Diamond rule, each man uses the others just to form his own autonomous behavior, though they do not define the canon of ethics; so this reciprocity is naturally lost.

Thus, it is too early to write off the Golden Rule. Particularly for the reason that the existence and application of this rule have no concern with academic studies: the Golden Rule accompanies our real life, relations and everyday experience.

The remainder of Chap. 1 consists mostly of translated fragments from the book *The Golden Rule of Behavior* written by Russian philosopher, Professor Lev E. Balashov; see [2] for the original version in Russian.

1.5 The Golden Rule as the Key Principle of Social Life

What is not good to ye, do not make ye to a friend.
—Clerk (deacon) Joannes⁹

Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet.¹⁰

Connections between the Golden Rule and moral philosophy, ethics, the sense of duty, law, and a healthy way of life are considered.

Let us summarize the outcomes. Recall that, in the positive form, the Golden Rule precepts, “Behave to others as you would like them to behave to you.” While the negative form is, “Do not behave to others as you would not like them to behave to you.”

The Golden Rule gives an integral and concentrated view of ethics by capturing its major aspect—the *relation to others as to oneself*. This rule establishes, fixes and defines a *measure* of human nature in everybody as well as morally *equalizes* all people and *likens* them to each other. In Guseinov’s opinion, whenever one speaks about moral equality one is concerned with only one thing—each individual is worthy of the right to happiness and “the mutual acknowledgement of this right is a prerequisite for moral communication.” The Golden Rule demands “from an individual to put himself/herself in place of other individuals and behave unto them as if he/she would be in their place.” “The mechanism of the Golden Rule can be defined as assimilation, as a requirement to mentally take the place of another individual.” [34, p. 134]. Moral equalization is a *quantitative* procedure while moral assimilation a *qualitative* procedure. Their combination yields a *measuring* process: the Golden Rule suggests each man to *harmonize* his deeds with the deeds of the others, using his “yardstick” for their deeds and, conversely, their “yardstick” for his own deeds. Following this rule, every man should find a *common measure* for his own deeds and the deeds of the others, always acting in accordance with this common measure.

⁹A quote from *Izbornik of Sviatoslav*, 1073.

¹⁰Latin “It is your concern when your neighbor’s wall is on fire.” A quote from *Epistles* I: 18, 84, by Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 B.C.), an outstanding Roman lyric poet and satirist, well-known in the English speaking world as Horace.

The negative statement of the Golden Rule establishes *the lowest admissible hurdle* or bound for the moral attitude of every man to the others, *prohibits doing evil*, thereby specifying the *minimum ethical requirements* to individual behavior.

In turn, its positive statement establishes the *highest admissible hurdle* for the moral attitude of every man to the others, *encourages doing good*, thereby providing *the maximum ethical requirements* to individual behavior.

Therefore, the Golden Rule covers the whole range of moral deeds and is a basis for discriminating between the ethical categories of *good* and *evil*. (J. Korczak wrote, “Many times I thought what “being good” means. To my mind, a good man is a man who has imagination and understands others, who can feel like others do.”¹¹ A quote from the book [84].)

The same function is performed by the Golden Rule subject to *the sense of duty*. To explain this, just consider it from another viewpoint—how does this rule *commensurate* the deeds of every man with the deeds of the others? Such a commensuration *proceeds* from the following line of reasoning adopted by every man. “I was born and set up in life by parents, people and society (fed, dressed, shod, educated, etc.), i.e., they all did good unto me, just as I *would like* the others do. So, I am going or *must* do unto them (parents, people, society) at least in the same way, i.e., my behavior *must not* deteriorate or reduce the quality and amount of life given to me and the others. Moreover, as much as possible, I *must* apply every effort to improve or increase the quality and amount of life (mine and of the others, of the whole society).” In this context, we also translate into English a good quote by P. Lavrov: “In the course of his development, an intellectually mature man must pay a considerably higher price than the cost of this development for the mankind.”¹² See the original in [91, p. 417].

This is a general understanding for the sense of duty. Of course, there exist different duties, depending on the meaning of “others.” If “others” are our parents, then the matter concerns our duty to them; if our nation or country, our duty to the Motherland; if all people in the world, our duty to the mankind.

A duty is a “normal deviation” from an optimal norm, like a need. In turn, a need is a deviation from an optimal norm subject to a healthy way of life of an individual. Likewise, a duty is a deviation from an optimal norm subject to a healthy way of life of a society. Duties fulfilment by specific people has the same value for a healthy society as satisfaction of needs for a healthy individual. In his youth, every man accumulates duty, as he mostly takes from the others and gives almost nothing in return. At mature age, every man repays by doing his duty.

While *moral philosophy (ethics)* regulates the relations among people as well as maintains a healthy society in a small neighborhood of an optimal norm (realization

¹¹Janusz Korczak, the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit, (1878–1942), was a Polish–Jewish doctor, writer, and child advocate [106] who, in order to maintain his orphanage, refused to escape Nazi-occupied Poland during World War II.

¹²Pyotr Lavrov, original name Pyotr Lavrovich Mirtov, (1823–1900), was a Russian Socialist philosopher, theorist of narodism, and publicist.

and fulfilment of duty), *law* does the same in a wider sense—bans, prevents, and cures *pathological* deviations from the optimal norm, often called offences and (or) crimes. Actually, *offences* and *crimes* have the same effect on a healthy society as *diseases* on a healthy individual. If many offences and crimes occur in a society, it is *de jure* sick. Such a society would hardly be healthy in the ethical sense.

The Golden Rule establishes a correlation between a healthy individual and a healthy society. It declares that the life and health of a society are formed by the people that compose it; that *morality* is valuable not by itself but as the result of a healthy way of life of a specific individual, as **a natural continuation** of this life and health. On the one hand, moral health is a part of social health (a group of people, a nation, etc.); on the other, a constituent of the individual health of every man belonging to a given society. *Law* is also not valuable by itself. It represents *a natural continuation* of morality and, like the latter, relies on the Golden Rule. T. Hobbes wrote that a man should “be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.” (see *Leviathan*, Chapter XIV). Nearly the same was claimed by an ancient political and juridical rule: “Everybody must obey only the law he/she has agreed with.” This rule may perhaps seem somewhat dogmatic yet it is correct in substance, being based on the Golden Rule. Compare it with another rule: “Observing the rights of the others, we protect our own rights” (from a movie by Jacques–Yves Cousteau, 1984). This rule is used by thousands of diggers in the Amazon goldfields, and thefts are a rarity there. A detailed analysis of its meaning shows that this rule is a particular case of the Golden Rule in the negative statement. Consequently, in the deep sense, ***law is a mutual admission and restriction of freedom***. A mutual admission of freedom yields various *human rights*, whereas a mutual restriction of freedom results in various *human duties*.

The Golden Rule is also remarkable for **self-sufficiency, self-connectedness and self-groundedness**. In particular, it combines an accidental “I want to...” with a necessary “I have to...” This combination finally gives what we call *freedom*. The Golden Rule is ***the formula of freedom***. Being combined in the Golden Rule, “I want to...” and “I have to...” complement and restrict each other as well as establish a measure and *moderate* each other.

With this combination of “I want to...” and “I have to...,” the Golden Rule also eliminates the ethical dilemma of *happiness versus duty*. It *demands* from every man only what he *wants* to be done unto himself. Not without reason it is called Golden.

A *negative ectype of the Golden Rule* is found in popular expressions, such as “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” and proverbs “as you sow so shall you reap”, etc. [5]. Their essence is that **if you were done evil, you have the right to or should repay in kind**. *Despite a superficial similarity with the Golden Rule, such an approach is actually its antipode*. This “rule” works when the Golden Rule is violated. Its destructive power for human relations can be illustrated by *vengeance* (if you do evil unto me, my response will be the same). In this sense, the most dangerous phenomenon is *blood vengeance*, which may cause annihilation of entire families.

One wonders: if the Golden Rule is so good, why do people infringe it on a regular basis, doing evil and not fulfilling their duty? Here we may draw an analogy with a healthy way of life and diseases. The latter do not make our health less valuable; on the contrary, a sick man tries to recover from his disease as soon as possible. Similarly, a breach of the Golden Rule does not reduce its value. In the total balance of human deeds, the deeds based on the Golden Rule outweigh the deeds that violate it. Otherwise, our society would be far gone and dying.

The Golden Rule is not so trivial as it may seem at a first glance. For this rule to work efficiently, at least two conditions are required:

1. *Man must be normal and healthy; if not, he must take into account any abnormality and lack of moral health while choosing his attitude to the others.*
The attitude to the others is the attitude to oneself.
2. *Man must be able to mentally put himself in place of the others, thereby making appropriate corrections in his behavior.* This procedure is not easy. Frequently people do harm to others not maliciously, but due to thoughtlessness, in particular, because they are unable to put themselves in place of the others.

Finally, it should be emphasize that the Golden Rule prohibits killing *in any form*. Indeed, no normal man wants to die, much less to be killed. If you do not want to be killed, you should not wish or do it unto others. Therefore, malicious or reckless killing, as well as enemy annihilation in war or execution of death penalty—all these contradict the Golden Rule.

1.6 Moral Decline of Modern Society

Do not treat others like you would not have them treat you.
—Russian proverb [8]

| The moral level of modern society is discussed.

Nowadays, people often say that modern society suffers from a moral decline and even from a continuous destruction of ethical norms [116].

According to the Merriam-Webster's definition, "ethics is the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation; the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; a set of moral issues or aspects (such as rightness)." At present times, almost anybody speaking about ethics will be blamed for hypocrisy and dissimulation. Obeying moral norms is no longer fashionable or prestigious. The elderly note that just several decades ago people were different—not hesitating to be gentle and admonitory to each other. Today we often feel awkward to offer our arm to a woman, to assist a blind person cross the road, etc., against the typical attitude of every man, his true nature.

The dynamics of these destructive processes of the human nature are well described by a Chinese poem:

In the 1950s people helped each other.

In the 1960s people competed with each other.

In the 1970s people betrayed each other.

In the 1980s people cared only about themselves.

In the 1990s people exploited for their benefit everybody they met.

Since the early 2000s, the moral sphere of modern society has been considerably devalued in the whole world. This is a direct consequence of the prevailing economic problems and related ideological and political issues: almost all actions of people are aimed at accumulation of material goods.

In a continuous pursuit of wealth, man has neglected spirituality and stopped thinking about inner self-development, ignoring the ethical aspect of his deeds. This trend dates back even to the end of the nineteenth century. Famous Russian writer and philosopher F.M. Dostoyevsky wrote about an uncontrollable itch for money that seized the people of that period up to stupefaction; see *The Idiot*.

Most people forgot (many had never been aware of!) the essence of the Golden Rule. The destructive processes in modern society may cause a serious stagnation for our civilization; what is more dangerous, further evolution may even reach an impasse.

An essential role in the fadeaway of society's morality, e.g., in Russia and Germany, was played by corresponding ideologies adopted by bolsheviks and nazi, respectively. A low ethical level of people often manifests itself at critical periods of history (revolutions, civil wars and external military conflicts, instable political regimes, etc.). For example, we mention the crying violation of state norms in Russia during the Civil War (1918–1921), World War II (1939–1945), Stalin's industrialization (1920s–1930s) and also nowadays, in the form of an epidemic of terrorist acts. All these events led to a deplorable result—the mass mortality of innocent people.

The ethical aspects are often disregarded in the management of state affairs, i.e., in the course of economic, social, agricultural and industrial reforms. As a rule, this has a negative impact on the environment.

In some countries, a currently unfavorable condition in many spheres of human life is a direct consequence of governmental miscalculations (incorrect decisions) given the current ethical level of the society. We are observing a deterioration in the criminal situation: a growing number of killings (including contract and brutal murders), tortures, thefts, rapes, corrupt practices, acts of vandalism, etc. In many cases, these actions go unpunished, as the crime detection and punishment rate went down. As a somewhat funny example of disorder and chaos, consider a much-talked-of story that occurred in the middle of the 1990s in one country. Two men were caught in the government house for stealing a cardboard box with \$500,000. After an official announcement that the owner of that money did not show up, the criminal case was closed and further investigation terminated. As a result, the two criminals became “the benefactors of the state” because they found “a buried treasure”; and

the money were redirected to government's coffers. Clearly, the owner of the money acquired it in a most underhand manner (otherwise, he/she would immediately claim the right for it). The public prosecutor's office had to identify the source of that cardboard box with a large sum of money. In fact, no investigation was conducted and the officials maintained a discreet silence why. To all evidence, police, courts and public prosecutor's office were unable to control the criminal situation in the country, the reason apparently being the high level of corruption of many public officials.

1.7 The Golden Rule and Policy

Power will intoxicate the best
 hearts, as wine the strongest
 heads. No man is wise enough,
 nor good enough to be trusted
 with unlimited power.
 —Colton¹³

Nobody should go into politics
 unless he has a hide like a rhinoceros.
 —Roosevelt¹⁴

This section was written under the impression of the lecture “The Golden Rule of Ethics and Its Interpretation in Policy” by Academician A. Guseinov, which was delivered on March 31, 2015, live on *Vmeste–RF*, the official channel of the Council of the Federation, the Upper Chamber of the Parliament of the Russian Federation.

Social Policy There exists a moral judgement of human activity in accordance with the behavioral rules accepted in a given society. The deeds of every man can be moral (worthy, noble, proper) and immoral. The criteria used to discriminate between them are called moral norms. In fact, morality is multiform, it can be treated as worldly wisdom, the divine commandments, a tool for maintaining social order, honesty in human relations, the supreme sense of human life, the inner voice of conscience or even obsolete requirements preventing us from being ourselves.

Morality is based on conscience (the ethical sense that allows every man to assess his deeds in terms of good and evil) and duty (the ethical will to act following one's own idea of correct behavior). Most of the world peoples have features of ethical behavior such as selflessness, courage, truthfulness, modesty, humanism, wisdom,

¹³Charles Henry Colton, (1848–1915), was an American clergyman of the Roman Catholic Church and writer.

¹⁴Franklin Delano Roosevelt, (1882–1945), was an American statesman and political leader who served as the 32nd President of the United States from 1933 until his death in 1945; he won a record four presidential elections.

to name a few. The qualities that are disapproved by many peoples (vices) include foolishness, self-interest, vanity, flattery, and so on.

The fundamental categories of morality are the representations about good and evil. These are most general concepts for assessing the actions and deeds of people. Good is the major value of every man, his moral sacred thing. Good stands against evil.

Each of us chooses between the paths of virtue or vice independently, but we still bear responsibility for this choice.

The generally accepted ethical requirements and guidelines of moral deeds constitute the universal component of moral consciousness that is common to all mankind. They express the demands of an ethical ideal as the supreme moral aim (the Golden Rule of ethics). Since the ancient times until present, the Golden Rule of ethics had underwent many changes, but today it still keeps the ideas of freedom and equality of all people, the self-esteem and dignity of each individual. As repeatedly mentioned, in its most general form it states, "Behave to others as you would like them to behave to you."

A special feature of morality is that it involves values, i.e., the preferences of people in accordance with their goals and ideals. The ethical values proceed from a comprehension of welfare (the supreme form of good, the state of complete harmony between a man and reality). This yields kindness, generosity, compassion, concern for one's neighbor, honesty, calmness, hope, and so on. All these values can be called virtues. They stand against such vices as hate, envy, pride, surfeit, egoism, greediness, and others.

For every man, moral perfection consists in shifting his internal proportions of good and evil towards the former. However, to do this every man should make his personal moral choice.

1.8 Is Ethical Policy Possible?

Nous dansons sur un volcan.¹⁵

The character of contradictions between policy and morality depends on the implementation processes of state power as well as on the types of ethical and political consciousness. At the same time, these conditions do not fully determine the matching of moral criteria with the fundamental principles of state authorities.

¹⁵French "We are dancing on a volcano." This famous phrase was addressed by French diplomat Narcisse-Achille de Salvandy to Louis Philippe, then the Duke of Orleans, at a grand ball given to the King of Naples. The words turned out to be a prophecy, as 2 months later French King Charles X was dethroned by the July Revolution of 1830. A similar expression is associated with Maximilien de Robespierre, (1758–1794), one of the leaders of the French Revolution: "Nous marchons sur des volcans."

Indeed, every social group is guided by its own ethical standards that justify or direct the activities of its members. This results in several centers of ethical energetics in politics. First of all, we may discuss the political ethics of different social groups—intellectuals, youth, working class and others—which characterizes the degree of assimilation of collective values by an individual. Moreover, in every country there exist public moral norms that are acknowledged by most of population as the main goals of life and activity. In turn, they can match to some degree the universal ethical rules that embody the supreme principles of humanism and unite people, despite their social, national, religious and other differences. These principles are “thou shalt not kill,” “thou shalt not steal,” and others.

From a political standpoint, the problem is to correlate these types of ethical reflection that prioritize human behavior in the field of state power. Perhaps the most acute problem concerns the role of different collective moral norms, as the supreme ethical ideals of a group pretend to replace public moral norms. In addition, separate groups may acknowledge the right of other groups for their own ideals, or may not. In the latter case, the representatives of such groups often believe that it is possible to compel people “for their own good” (due to their ignorance, blindness and misunderstanding of true goals) or may consider any contacts and compromises with political opponents as inadmissible weakness or even betrayal, etc.

In other words, an extremely dangerous phenomenon for a society is the elevation of collective values to the rank of public ethics. This causes a moral decline and dehumanization of politics. For example, bolsheviks considered ethical “only what serves the cause of working class, which creates the society of communists.” As a result, they neglected the common values of the mankind and provoked the bloody bacchanalia of the civil war. During Stalin’s period, snitching against friends and relatives was officially supported by the soviet authorities. Also recall the extremely cruel, barbaric treatment of the political opponents in Pol Pot’s Cambodia, Mao’s China and some other countries. As reasonably noted by Father A. Men,¹⁶ the relativization of morality, the pretentiousness and impenetrability of collective standards for more general ethical values inevitably lead to violence and “the pluralism of skulls.”

The fixation of basic ethical principles in the system of legal regulation and also the development of special structures in state authorities to control the ethical behavior of public politicians and officials (e.g., restriction of gifts, prevention of nepotism, etc.) are of crucial importance. Another considerable aspect is to organize public control of state authorities (in form of mass media and non-governmental organizations reporting of corruption, false, and so on).

¹⁶Alexander V. Men, (1935–1990), was a Russian Orthodox priest, theologian, Biblical scholar and writer.

In each country, such a political course must be implemented together with a proper moral climate in which neither the leader nor ordinary people would shift the burden of responsibility to certain public or political institutions (family, party, organization). Only the ethical independence of an individual can serve as a foundation for the raising of politically conscientious citizens and maintaining morality as a source for a human-oriented political system of state power.