A Formalized Ethical Theory

Being *rational* in our moral beliefs requires being informed, imaginative, consistent, and so forth. Species of *consistency* include:

- *logicality* (basic consistency between beliefs),
- *ends-means consistency*,
- *conscientiousness* (keeping our actions, resolutions, and desires in harmony with our moral beliefs),
- *impartiality* (making similar evaluations about similar actions), and
- *the golden rule* (treating others only as we consent to being treated in the same situation).

"Blacks ought to be treated poorly – because they're inferior."

To criticize Ima Racist's reasoning, (a) clarify the argument, (b) criticize factual errors, and (c) see if he applies his moral principle consistently.

All blacks have an IQ of less than 80.
All who have an IQ of less than 80
   ought to be treated poorly.
∴ All blacks ought to be treated poorly.

Impartiality: Make similar evaluations about (exactly or relevantly) similar actions, regardless of the individuals involved.

Impartiality forbids you to combine these three beliefs:

- act A is right,
- act B isn't right,
- acts A and B are exactly or relevantly similar.

> If you want X to do A to you, then do A to X.
>
> $(u{:}A\underline{x}u \supset A\underline{u}x)$

The literal golden rule can lead to absurdities when the parties are in *different situations* or have *flawed desires*:

different situations	If you want Dr. Davis to remove your appendix, then remove her appendix.
flawed desires	If you (in a fit of self-hating depression) want everyone to hurt you, then hurt everyone yourself.

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
and thus 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 <u>if</u> <u>I</u>
<u>were</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>same</u> <u>situation</u>
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 (out of ignorance of what $1 can buy) is willing that he be paid that much in his workers' place. It doesn't follow that his act is right.

Gensler's GR

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

Formulating GR correctly requires:

(1) a **SAME-SITUATION** clause,
(2) a present attitude toward a hypothetical situation (say "**WILLING THAT IF**"), and
(3) a **CONSISTENCY** form that forbids a combination (acting + being unwilling to be treated that way) instead of commanding specific actions.

If I'm conscientious and impartial, then I won't steal Detra's bicycle unless I'm willing that my bicycle be stolen in the same situation:

I steal Detra's bicycle	→ conscientious	I believe it would be all right for me to steal her bicycle

⬇ impartial

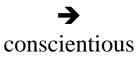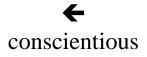| I'm willing that my bicycle be stolen in the same situation	← conscientious	I believe it would be all right for my bicycle to be stolen in the same situation

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We can already prove the first step:

$\sim$(\underline{u}:A\underline{u}x $\cdot$ $\sim$\underline{u}:RA\underline{u}x)

Don't act to do A to X without believing
that it's all right for you to do A to X.

I steal Detra's bicycle	$\rightarrow$ conscientious	I believe it would be all right for me to steal her bicycle

$\Downarrow$ impartial

I'm willing that my bicycle be stolen in the same situation	$\leftarrow$ conscientious	I believe it would be all right for my bicycle to be stolen in the same situation

We need to symbolize these two ideas:

- "In the same situation, it would be all right for X to do A to me."

- "X may do A to me."

I steal Detra's bicycle	→ conscientious	I believe it would be all right for me to steal her bicycle

↓ impartial

I'm willing that my bicycle be stolen in the same situation	← conscientious	I believe it would be all right for my bicycle to be stolen in the same situation

X may do A to me   =   MA<u>x</u>u

"M<u>A</u>" ("A may be done") is a permissive, a weak member of the imperative family. Accepting a permissive commits one to *consenting* to the act being done (*approving* of it, *being willing* that it be done) – but not necessarily to positively desiring that it be done. Accepting "R<u>A</u>" commits you to accepting "M<u>A</u>":

G1 | R<u>A</u>   →   M<u>A</u>

If it's all right for you to do A to X, then in the same situation it would be all right for X to do A to you.

= (RA<u>u</u>x ⊃ (∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ RA<u>x</u>u)))

= If it's all right for you to do A to X, then, for some universal property F, F is the complete description of your-doing-A-to-X in universal terms, and, in any actual or hypothetical case, if X's-doing-A-to-you is F, then it would be all right for X to do A to you.

"F" is a universal property variable; we will sometimes also use action variables, like "<u>X</u>."

"F*<u>A</u>" means "F is the complete description of act A in universal terms."

"■" means "in every actual or hypothetical case."

Universalizability

If it's all right for X to do A, then it would be all right for anyone else to do A in the same situation.

If act A is permissible, then there is some universal property (or conjunction of such properties) F, such that: (1) act A is F, and (2) in any actual or hypothetical case every act that is F is permissible.

$$(R\underline{A} \supset (\exists F)(F\underline{A} \cdot \blacksquare(\underline{X})(F\underline{X} \supset R\underline{X})))$$

G5 | $R\underline{A} \quad \rightarrow \quad (\exists F)(F\underline{A} \cdot \blacksquare(\underline{X})(F\underline{X} \supset R\underline{X}))$

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Complete Descriptions

$$F*\underline{A} \quad \begin{aligned} =\ & \text{F is the complete description of act A in} \\ & \quad \text{universal terms.} \\ =\ & \text{Act A is F, and, for every universal prop-} \\ & \quad \text{erty G that A has, it's logically necessary} \\ & \quad \text{that every act that's F is also G.} \end{aligned}$$

G10 $\boxed{\quad F*\underline{A} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad (F\underline{A} \cdot (G)(G\underline{A} \supset \Box(\underline{X})(F\underline{X} \supset G\underline{X}))) \quad}$

G11 $\boxed{\quad \rightarrow \quad (\underline{X})(\exists F)F*\underline{X} \quad}$

Gensler's GR:	GR forbids this combination:
Treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation.	• I do something to another. • I'm unwilling that this be done to me in the same situation.

$$\sim(\underline{u}{:}A\underline{u}x \cdot \sim\underline{u}{:}(\exists F)(F{*}A\underline{u}x \cdot \blacksquare(FA\underline{x}u \supset MA\underline{x}u)))$$

Don't combine (1) accepting "Do A to X" with (2) not accepting "For some universal property F, F is the complete description in universal terms of my-doing-A-to-X, and, in any actual or hypothetical situation, if X's-doing-A-to-me is F, then X may do A to me."

[∴ ~(u:A<u>u</u>x • ~<u>u</u>:(∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u)))

1   asm: (<u>u</u>:A<u>u</u>x • ~<u>u</u>:(∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u)))

2   ∴ <u>u</u>:A<u>u</u>x   {from 1}

3   ∴ ~<u>u</u>:(∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u))   {from 1}   **In rev stn, X may**

4   u ∴ ~(∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u))   {from 3}   **not do A to me.**

5   u ∴ A<u>u</u>x   {from 2}   **Do A to X!**

6   u asm: ~RA<u>u</u>x   {we need to derive "RA<u>u</u>x"}

7   u ∴ O~A<u>u</u>x   {from 6}

8   u ∴ ~A<u>u</u>x   {from 7}

9   u ∴ RA<u>u</u>x   {from 6; 5 contradicts 8}   **My doing A to X is all right.**

\# 10   u ∴ (∃F)(FA<u>u</u>x • ■(<u>X</u>)(F<u>X</u> ⊃ R<u>X</u>))   {from 9 by G5}   **Any similar act**

11   u ∴ (GA<u>u</u>x • ■(<u>X</u>)(G<u>X</u> ⊃ R<u>X</u>))   {from 10}   **is all right.**

12   u ∴ GA<u>u</u>x   {from 11}   **My-doing-A-to-X is G.**

13   u ∴ ■(<u>X</u>)(G<u>X</u> ⊃ R<u>X</u>)   {from 11}   **Any act that is G is all right.**

\# 14   u ∴ (<u>X</u>)(∃F)F*<u>X</u>   {by rule G11}

15   u ∴ (∃F)F*A<u>u</u>x   {from 14}   **H = the complete descrip-**

16   u ∴ H*A<u>u</u>x   {from 15}   **tion of my-doing-A-to-X.**

\# 17   u ∴ (HA<u>u</u>x • (F)(FA<u>u</u>x ⊃ □(<u>X</u>)(H<u>X</u> ⊃ F<u>X</u>)))   {from 16 by G10}

18 u ∴ HA<u>u</u>x   {from 17}

19 u ∴ (F)(FA<u>u</u>x ⊃ □(<u>X</u>)(H<u>X</u> ⊃ F<u>X</u>))   {from 17}

20 u ∴ (GA<u>u</u>x ⊃ □(<u>X</u>)(H<u>X</u> ⊃ G<u>X</u>))   {from 19}

21 u ∴ □(<u>X</u>)(H<u>X</u> ⊃ G<u>X</u>)   {from 12 and 20}   **Any act that is H is G.**

22 u ∴ (F)~(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u))   {from 4}

23 u ∴ ~(H*A<u>u</u>x • ■(HA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u))   {from 22}

24 u ∴ ~■(HA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u)   {from 16 and 23}

\# 25 uH ∴ ~(HA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u)   {from 24 by G8}

26 uH ∴ HA<u>x</u>u   {from 25}   **X-doing-A-to-me is H.**

27 uH ∴ ~MA<u>x</u>u   {from 25}   **X may not do A to me!**

28 uH ∴ (<u>X</u>)(H<u>X</u> ⊃ G<u>X</u>)   {from 21}

29 uH ∴ (HA<u>x</u>u ⊃ GA<u>x</u>u)   {from 28}

30 uH ∴ GA<u>x</u>u   {from 26 and 29}

\# 31 uH ∴ (<u>X</u>)(G<u>X</u> ⊃ R<u>X</u>)   {from 13 by G7}

32 uH ∴ (GA<u>x</u>u ⊃ RA<u>x</u>u)   {from 31}

33 uH ∴ RA<u>x</u>u   {from 30 and 32}   **It is all right for X to do A to me.**

\# 34 uH ∴ MA<u>x</u>u   {from 33 by G1}   **X may do A to me!**

35 ∴ ~(<u>u</u>:A<u>u</u>x • ~<u>u</u>:(∃F)(F*A<u>u</u>x • ■(FA<u>x</u>u ⊃ MA<u>x</u>u)))   {fm 1; 27 contra 34}

This ends our proof of the golden rule:

Always treat others as you want to be treated; that is the summary of the Law and the Prophets. (Mt 7:12)

~(u:A_ux · ~u:(∃F)(F*A_ux · ■(FA_xu ⊃ MA_xu)))