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

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!”
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

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

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 ➔

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