

# Ethics: Some Thoughts on How We Should Live

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Back in the 1960s, when I was in college (Duke) and grad school (Cornell), a common saying seen on posters was:

**DO IT!**

Since then, it has been picked up as a slogan by Nike, a major maker of sports-wear & equipment.



# The Ethics of "Do it!"

- After 50+ years of reflection on this advice and observing the consequences that follow from obeying it ...
- It strikes me that this is one of the most foolish ethical principles imaginable.
- It is not too far behind Faust's motto: "Evil, be thou my good!"
- It would be interesting to know how many people in these intervening years have actually used this principle to guide their own lives.



# Evaluating "Do it!"

- There are, no doubt, many people who have some good plans, but because of their own timid nature, never try to put them into effect.
- Such people, in such cases, may very well profit from obeying the advice of a friend to just do it.
- But, as a general principle of action, this advice stinks.

# Evaluating "Do it!"

- Why is that?
- Well, I have only lived in one head, so I cannot speak for others.
- But I strongly suspect my experience is quite common, maybe even universal.
- Now and then, an idea pops into my mind which is foolish, dangerous, or immoral.
- It would thus be foolish, dangerous or immoral to obey such ideas.

# Some Examples

- When I was young, and had just learned to ride a bicycle, I wondered what would happen if I suddenly turned sharply to the right or left while riding along.
- One doesn't need to major in physics (as I later did) to realize this would be quite disastrous. It's even very hazardous with an automobile.
- It was good for my health that I never tried this to find out!



# Some Examples

- At some similar age, I noticed that a pair of tweezers had two prongs on the end, rather like those on an electrical plug.
- I wondered what would happen if I stuck the tweezer prongs into an electrical outlet.
- I "did it," and was extremely fortunate that I only blew a fuse instead of being electrocuted.
- It's a wonder I survived to adulthood!

# Some Examples

- On a number of occasions while out hiking, I have stood at the top of a cliff.
- I sometimes hear a voice inside my head that says "Jump!"
- So far, I have not obeyed this impulse.
- This sort of thing should make one suspicious of acting on ideas without evaluating them, that is, "just doing it!"

# Some Examples

- One wonders how many murders, rapes and other such wicked actions may not be the result of someone just acting upon an impulse that comes into his mind.
- Clearly, "Just do it!" is not a good principle by which to conduct one's life.
- What could we put in place of this to help us decide how we should live?

Golden Rule  
  
do unto others as you  
would have them do unto you.

# The Golden Rule

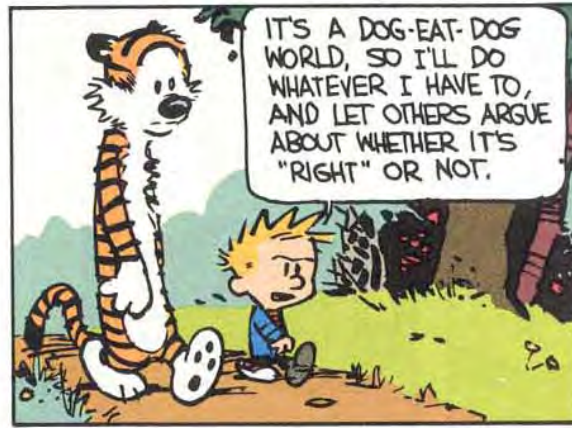
We want to look at this in just a minute, but first a word from two famous philosophers: Calvin (not John) and Hobbs (not Thomas)...

# Calvin and Hobbes

BY WATTERSON



GET WHAT YOU CAN WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD - THAT'S WHAT I SAY! MIGHT MAKES RIGHT! THE WINNERS WRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS!

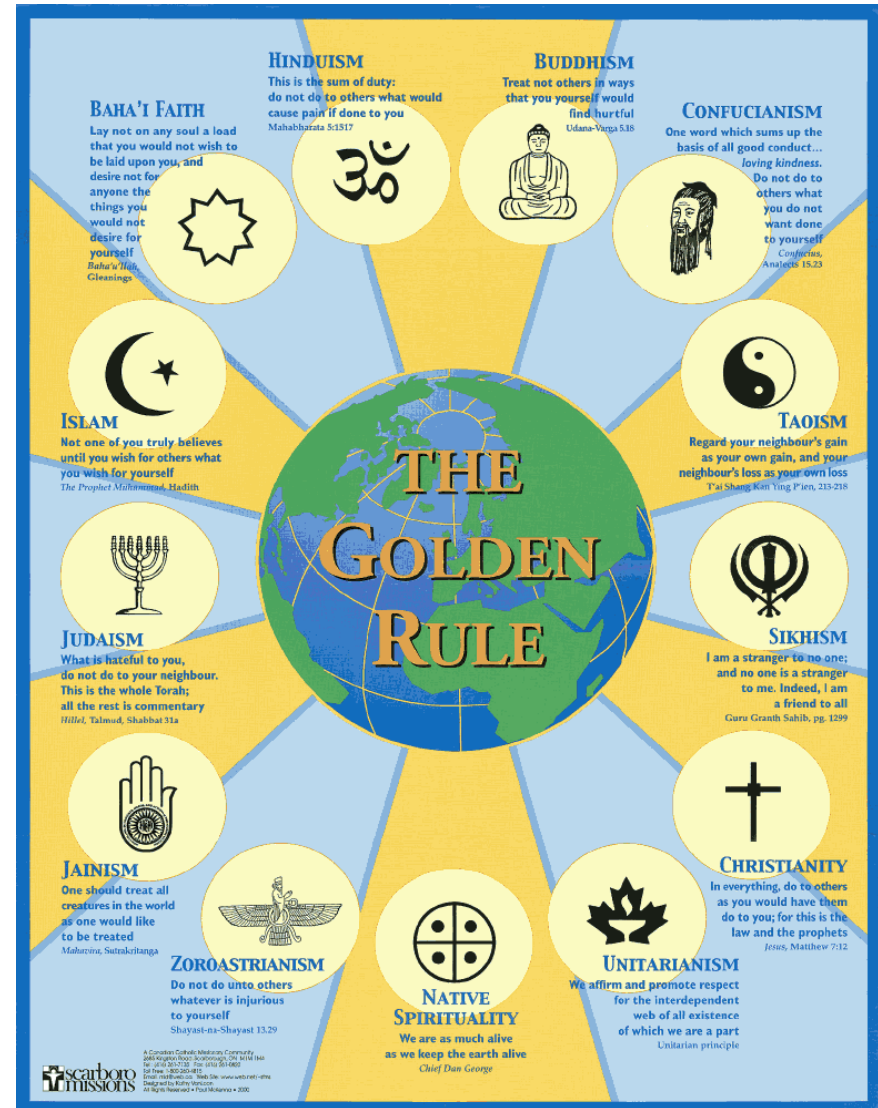


The so-called "golden rule," spoken by Jesus in Matthew 7:12, would be a good rule for living.

A somewhat similar idea is found in the ethics of numerous other cultures and religions.

# The Golden Rule

- Not all of the sayings on this poster are very close to the Golden Rule, but a number are.
- Let's look at the closer examples.





# Hinduism

This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.

Mahabharata 5:1317

# Buddhism

Treat not others in ways that  
you yourself would find  
hurtful.

Udana-Varga 5.18

# Confucianism

One word which sums up  
the basis of all good conduct  
... *loving kindness*. Do not  
do to others what you do not  
want done to yourself.

Analects 15.23

# Taoism

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

T'ai Shang K'am Ying P'ien, 213-218

# Islam

Not one of you truly believes  
until you wish for others  
what you wish for yourself.

Muhammad, *Hadith*

# Judaism

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.  
This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.

Hillel, Shabbat 31a

# Jainism

One should treat all  
creatures in the world as  
one would like to be treated.

Mahurviru, Suttrakritanga

# Zoroastrianism

Do not do unto others  
whatever is injurious to  
yourself.

Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29



These sayings are all rather similar, though most of them emphasize the negative (not doing what is harmful) rather than the positive (doing what is good).

A similar saying is that of Jesus, and of the Old Testament: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:39 & Leviticus 19:18

If everyone lived by such ethical principles, life would almost be heaven on earth, wouldn't it?

But everyone doesn't live this way. Why not?

# Fear

- I think most people are afraid to try to live this way; they fear that someone will take advantage of them.
- And given the way people are, they are probably right!
- Yet the God of the Bible promises us that He works all things together for good for those who love Him. (Romans 8:28).

# Fear

- This doesn't mean there may not be any bad short-term consequences of such behavior, that no one will take advantage of us. They may very well do so.
- It does mean that God will see to it that in the long run (perhaps beyond this life), it will be worth it all to have lived in this way.

# Another Ethical Principle

- This is where Christianity adds something that is often missing from other religions.
- Jesus said that the greatest principle is not to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, but to love God with all our being.
- Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment." Matt 22:37-38 (NIV)

# Loving God

- So if we love God with all we are and have, then we can trust Him that it is ultimately safe to love others.
- We can trust Him that He will work all things together for good, even though this may not be obvious in the short-term.
- This provides an important foundation on which to build & stabilize love for neighbor.

# Inability

- There's another reason why people don't live this way: we aren't good enough!
- Try as we might, we often find ourselves doing things to others that we wouldn't want them to do to us, and not doing for them what we would wish others to do for us.
- That is, whatever we may say or think, we really don't love others like we love ourselves.



# A Solution

- This is where the Christian teaching about the Holy Spirit comes in.
  - God Himself comes to live within us to cause us to want to be like Him & to do what is right.
- This is also where the Christian teaching about the work of Jesus comes in.
  - Jesus, who is also God Himself, provides our righteousness and pays for our sins, thus providing room for us to begin to be what we ought to be.

# Christianity & Ethics

- Biblical Christianity is an ethical system, but it is more than just an ethical system.
- It is also a rescue system, by which God solves the problem of our inability (& even unwillingness) to be what we ought to be.
- Let's look at some more of the ethical principles of Biblical Christianity.
- The ones I cite here are all very general.

# The First Commandment

Love the Lord your God with  
all your heart and with all  
your soul and with all your  
mind.

Matthew 22:37

# The Second Commandment

Love your neighbor as  
yourself.

Matthew 22:39

# The Golden Rule

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:12

# Micah's Principles

He has showed you, O man,  
what is good. And what does  
the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your  
God. Micah 6:8

# The Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

# Conclusions

- When we trust in what Jesus has done:
  - His death pays for our shortcomings.
  - His life provides the kind of ethical living that we cannot provide on our own.
  - The Holy Spirit begins to live within us, to begin to make us into what we were designed to be.
  - We are provided room to begin to be what we ought to be.



# Conclusions

- Jesus said:
- "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10
- Would you like to have life to the full?
- You can, by calling out to God for forgiveness, and trusting in what Jesus has done.



# The End

# Ethics

May we find God, who is the  
Source of all true ethics!