### The Deep Beauty of the Golden Rule

R.M. MacIver (1952) Introduction to Philosophy Professor Douglas Olena

- The struggle between ideas and beliefs of various and conflicting origins;
- the failure of any belief system to be in practice universalizable;
- the impossibility of suggesting goals of happiness, good or God(s) all founder on the incommensurability of definitions and practices, the inability of any appeal to reason and the unreasonableness of legislating or enforcing a moral code.

- From this impasse no system of ethical rules has been able to deliver itself.
- How can ethics lay down final principles of behavior that are not your values against mine, your group's values against my group's? 210

- MacIver suggests that just because our values are different or even in opposition, does not mean that we should abandon them. For to do so would be tantamount to abandonment of our selves.
- It is that the relativity of values between you and me, between your group and my group, your sect and my sect, makes futile nearly all learned disquisitions about the first principles of ethics. 211

- Philosophy begins with reasoning about the nature of things. How can reasoning decide between my values and yours?
- Values do not claim truth in any scientific sense; instead they claim validity, rightness. They do not declare what is so but what *should* be so.
- To what court of appeals do we go when our values conflict?
- The lack of any court is the final *fact* about final values.

#### One Universal Rule

- Does this all mean that a universal ethical principle, applicable alike to me and you, even where our values diverge, is impossible; that there is no rule to go by, based on reason itself, in this world of irreconcilable valuations?
- There is one universal rule that applies to all, irrespective of ideology, science or religion: The golden rule. 211

#### One Universal Rule

- Do to others as you would have them do to you.
- This is the only rule that stands by itself in the light of its own reason, the only rule that can stand by itself in the naked, warring universe, in the face of contending values of men and groups. 211

- The golden rule prescribes a mode of behaving, not a goal of action. On the level of goals, of final values there is irreconcilable conflict.
- The deep beauty of the golden rule is that instead of attacking the will in other men, it offers them a new dimension.
- It teaches us to trade contexts and imagine ourselves in the other's place. 212

- The golden rule does not take sides or contend with contending values. It contains no dogma.
- The exercise of power over an other cuts off the one exercising the power from the community of commonness in mankind.
- So when one does evil to one's neighbor one is doing evil to one's self.
- Conversely doing good to one's neighbor rebounds to one's self. 212

It is the only principle that allows every man to follow his own intrinsic values while nevertheless it transforms the chaos of warring codes into a reasonably well-ordered universe. 213

- The greatest evils have not been committed by the pleasure lovers, self seekers or the merely amoral but by those who were driven by their values or ideologies. 213
- What historical examples do we have of this principle?
- What example do we have in our age that this is so?

### What Does the Golden Rule Do?

- It does not solve for us our ethical problems but offers only a way of approach.
- It does not prescribe our treatment of others but only the spirit in which we should treat them.
- It has no simple mechanical application and often enough is hard to apply.... 214

### Who is Right?

- We believe that our values are correct.
- But does that correctness in the guise of wisdom seek to compel others to adopt our values? Can we force others to be free?
- That just proves the disvalue of ideological solutions to the problem of generating rules.
- The golden rule does not answer the question of "who is right." It cares nothing for that issue. It rather invites us to evaluate our behavior.