

# The Golden Rule

## *A Universal Moral Ethic for Civil Society by Don Eberly*

### INTRODUCTION

Much of the world appears to be searching for a framework of moral belief uniquely relevant to our time and circumstances: one that is positive and inspiring, one that is universally acceptable and thus unifying, one which is grounded in spiritual principles but non-sectarian, and one which is general enough to be adopted not only by every sector of our own society but quite possibly by all societies in an increasingly inter-connected globe.

The quest for new beginnings in the area of social ethics is not new for Americans. There are numerous examples of occasions in America's past when periods of moral and ethical loosening were followed by periods of constraint and reform. Each period tends to focus on a particular principle that draws people together from diverse backgrounds. During one such period, the late nineteenth century, American business, civic, and political leaders turned to the Golden Rule as a universal ethic to guide the moral renewal of society. The question addressed by this essay is whether or not the Golden Rule might be uniquely suited to meeting similar conditions today.

### THE CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT

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Evidence of the need for this ethical foundation within American society is seen in the continuing trend toward incivility and rudeness, random violence, and pervasive confusion over the moral rules by which a free and voluntary society should be governed. Large majorities of the general public have registered consistent concerns over the erosion of social values and the thinning out of civic institutions.

Pollster Daniel Yankelovich describes a decades long decline which is consistent across gender, age, race, and geographic region. While most Americans harbor an optimistic outlook regarding the nation's economic future, 67 percent believe that America is in "a long-term moral decline," according to Yankelovich.<sup>1</sup> Citizens widely report being concerned about the decline of neighborliness

and an unwillingness of many of their fellow citizens to rise above self-interest. The words commonly used by ordinary citizens to describe this phenomenon of declining civility, character, and trust are "fragmenting" or "fracturing."

Yankelovich observes that the most consequential transformation in our culture has come from large numbers of people moving from an attitude of "duty

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to others” to a sense of “duty to self.” This perception that too many people are out for themselves is generating strong support for a higher set of social standards focusing, once again, on the qualities of respecting and caring for one another.

Those who would seek to confront our cultural conditions must acknowledge the uniqueness of current American attitudes about moral life if they wish to succeed. Americans see both these social maladies and the solution to them located in the context of civil society. Americans do not believe that moral life will be renewed through divisive rhetoric or strategies relying on legislative or governmental cures for cultural problems.

By contrast, efforts that promote moral renewal by means of persuasion and consensus-building and within the voluntary sector of civil society — our voluntary associations, neighborhoods, civic organizations, places of worship and popular culture — enjoy wide public support. The American people believe values must be restored in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

## SEARCHING FOR ETHICAL UNITY AMIDST ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Like never before, the human race needs common principles for the ordering of social and moral life. Two great tides are simultaneously affecting the human race at the dawn of the twenty-first century: one, the continued rapid movement toward greater ethnic and religious pluralism combined with wider technological and commercial integration as a global community; and two, the rise of profoundly complex ethical challenges across the globe. The question becomes: what universal principle might exist to which a majority of the world’s diverse populations, both secular and religious, might consent for encouraging civilized human conduct?

Coming to agreement over common values can be difficult. These moral debates can divide. But no one can deny that all societies need a moral code. Political and moral philosopher Vaclav Havel, who spent his life searching for ways to recover moral transcendence, first as a writer and then as President of the Czech Republic, believes that human civilization will only be possible if “we all accept a basic code of mutual coexistence, a kind of common minimum we can all share, one that will enable us to go on living side by side.”<sup>2</sup>

That “common minimum” may look different in today’s society in which Muslims outnumber Episcopalians and whites will be an ethnic minority by mid-century. Much of the moral and philosophical grounds for America’s social system originated on European soil, but the foundational principles of justice and virtue transcend particular religious traditions and ethnic backgrounds. They are rooted in natural laws that can be discerned and applied by humankind anywhere.

Havel maintains that while we may need to continue to expand the combined traditions of classical, Judaic, and Christian belief systems, we must find somewhere in the foundations of religions and cultures “respect for what transcends us; certain imperatives that come to us from heaven, or from nature, or from our own hearts; a belief that our deeds will live after us; respect for our neighbors, for our families, for certain natural authorities; respect for human dignity and for nature; a sense of solidarity and benevolence towards guests that come with good intentions.”<sup>3</sup>

Many observers believe that progress toward a global spiritual and moral renewal has been stymied during recent decades because of our collective failure to recover positive moral principles that can be universally applied. However, as numerous trends indicate,

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people across the globe believe that precisely these principles can and must be discovered and widely applied in our lives. The search for moral foundations can be found today in the renewed interest that is being expressed in religion and spirituality, including faith-based social policies, the increased popularity of character education, and the search for manners and basic ethical rules

for living. Whereas the search for happiness was until recently assumed to take society in ever more secular directions, most now acknowledge that achieving personal health and happiness, not to mention social harmony and global progress, will require the embrace of universal “laws of life.”

Another challenge to recovering moral consensus is a set of American tendencies usually described under the rubric of individualism. Embracing a moral order larger than the individual is difficult when much of the language of society focuses on the rights and entitlements of the private, individual self, not individuals bound together by common needs. Thus individualism has come under increased focus as a leading cause of declining social cohesion and civic health.

While the United States has always placed a premium on the individual, perhaps more so than any civilization, the individualism of today is thought of as more extreme. What must be recognized is that two forms of individualism have vied for acceptance. One “is moral, ultimately grounded in religion, according to which life is sacred and each person is unique, irreplaceable and priceless; the other is rational and utilitarian, in which the social good is whatever best satisfies the preferences of individual actors.”<sup>4</sup>

This latter form of utilitarian individualism, combined with moral relativism, has not been friendly to the institutions of civil society, according to most observers. In fact, the pervasive moral skepticism and doubt of our time comes as close as any other factor to being the chief cause of the near collapse of authority and legitimacy that institutions need to function in a society. Since the 1960s, says Amitai Etzioni, “many of our traditions, social values and institutions have been challenged, often for valid reasons,” but he adds, the end result is that “we live in a state of increasing moral confusion and social anarchy.”<sup>5</sup>

Much of the impetus behind these chaos-producing trends is a philosophical utilitarianism that may be leading the United States away from the possibility of a peaceful and enduring public order.

### **GOLDEN RULE: POSITIVE, UNIVERSAL, AND PRACTICAL**

If there is a principle that might serve as the keystone to a new moral framework it is the Golden Rule. At the same time moral and utilitarian, universal

and particular, spiritual and temporal, the Golden Rule is one of the best principles for wide application, and quite possibly the best chance for a breakthrough solution in a world searching for moral cohesion. Everyone seems to want more character, more civility, and more responsibility. But merely desiring these things is not enough. One must ask: what is the basic moral principle that might form the basis of a new social ethos in which all of those positive habits are widely recovered and practiced?

The chief advantage of the Golden Rule is that it transcends cultures, particular moral codes, and religious

creeds and confessions. The Golden Rule is codified in every major and minor world religion and is embraced by eastern and western philosophies alike. Sir John Templeton, a long-time advocate of the Golden Rule, writes, “There must be something powerfully effective in the Golden Rule because its guidance, perhaps with slightly different phrasing, is found in every major religion and regarded as one of the basic spiritual principles of life.” It is also supported by the vast majority of the non-religious, making it the potential keystone of a universal social covenant.<sup>6</sup>

### **THE POWER OF POSITIVE, LIFE-AFFIRMING MORALITY**

The Golden Rule offers distinct advantages as the foundation of social ethics when compared to other approaches and ethical principles. Many current attempts to restore values and character have one or another of the following flaws: 1) they are too complex or abstract; 2) too elitist and not accessible enough for the masses; or 3) simply do not enjoy a near-universal consensus.

Many approaches to moral uplift fail for a more basic reason: they are simply too negative to inspire the sympathies of the people. Morality must be more than a negative proposition. There is a time and place for moral rules to be presented in the negative — “don’t do this, don’t do that,” “control your impulses,” “obey the rules,” “don’t act selfishly

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or rudely.” But moral life must be more than an affair of imposition and enforcement, says Jeffery Wattles, author of *The Golden Rule* and a leading authority on ethics. It must be more than “a cultural voice that says ‘no.’” According to Wattles, “Morality comes to its highest fruition in a life devoted to truth, beauty, and goodness on material, intellectual, and spiritual levels.”

Character education expert Thomas Lickona agrees that moral objectives often present morality as a set of negative propositions or obligations. They play an essential role because they tell us “for the most part what not to do.” But this “prohibitive morality,” as he describes it, is not enough. “A responsibility ethic supplies the vital giving side of morality.” Says Lickona: “The call to ‘love your neighbor’ and ‘think of others’ is open-ended; it doesn’t tell us how much we should sacrifice for our families, give to charitable causes, work for our communities, or be there for those who need us. But a morality of responsibility does point us in the right direction. Over the long haul it calls us to try, in whatever way we can, to nurture and support each other, alleviate suffering, and make the world a better place for all.”<sup>7</sup>

The other issue that surfaces in regard to promoting moral rules is the issue of penalties versus rewards. This was the genius of successful

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approaches to inspiring moral behavior in the past. The objective of *The McGuffey’s Readers*, for example, was to employ stories and examples of heroism to kindle a desire for honesty, kindness, faithfulness, and courage. *The McGuffey’s Readers* offered children direct moral advice based upon the Golden Rule. “Always do to other children as you wish them to do to you. This is the Golden Rule. So remember it when you play. Act upon it now, and when you are grown up, do not forget it.”<sup>8</sup>

Morality, in other words, is life affirming and conducive to happiness and success. But the moral life itself requires affirming. Moral affirmation in today’s lax climate requires recovering a “moral voice,” one that does not merely censure, but which “blesses,” says Amatai Etzioni. It is time to reconstruct social values, says Etzioni, not along the lines of merely asserting authority such as in the 1950s, but along lines which nevertheless have us once more providing “moral affirmation.”<sup>9</sup> We affirm moral action in community when “we appreciate, praise, recognize, celebrate and toast those who serve their communities, from volunteer fire fighters to organizers of neighborhood crime watches.”<sup>10</sup>

In other words, principled living flourishes when it arises out of a positive quest for the good life, or for the joys of life which are the common aim of all. Understood this way, the Golden Rule is embraced as an aid to individual growth and, in its wider application, the source of social progress. It presents itself as a formula for acting upon existing moral aspirations and a widely shared vision for social progress. The Golden Rule facilitates the development of higher forms of living at the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual levels. The primary merit of the Golden Rule is that it serves as a principle — broad, positive, and general — for application in the arena of practical ethics, both personal and social, national as well as international.

The final advantage of the Golden Rule is that it appeals to one’s natural sense of self-interest, practical utility, and reciprocity. Unlike the claims of religious creeds or of binding moral truths, the Golden Rule can serve as the basis of a modern social covenant because it appeals to the wide tendency within modernity to consider the utilitarian value and actual life-giving benefits of principles. Rather than summoning individuals to the moral life strictly on the basis of moral “ought” or obligation,

the Golden Rule is grounded equally in the enlightenment principle of rational self-interest and personal choice. Some may choose to apply the Golden Rule as a life ethic out of self-transcending love of others; many more may do so in the rational expectation that acts of mercy and kindness will be justly reciprocated.

## THE INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE TO MORAL FOUNDATIONS

One might ask how society got to this point of confusion over foundational moral principles in American society. Those who have analyzed the evolution of moral thought in Western societies, and particularly in America, point to several powerful currents that have eroded moral consensus.

One influence, of course, is the state of moral philosophy generally within influence centers of American society, especially universities. Modern philosophy, says eminent political scientist James Q. Wilson, author of *The Moral Sense*, with some exceptions, represents a fundamental break with philosophical traditions of the past that held individuals capable of, and responsible for, acting morally toward one another. For the last century, he says, “few of the great philosophical theories of human behavior have accorded much weight to the possibility that men and women are naturally endowed with anything remotely resembling a moral sense.” In recent years, Wilson maintains that moral philosophy fell to a “relentlessly materialistic doctrine in which morality, religion and philosophy have no independent meaning.”<sup>11</sup>

In this materialistic universe, people are understood to have instincts and appetites, but no “moral sense,” no moral law written on their hearts, no innate conscience. Freud, Marx, and behavioralism hold man to be little more than a product of the incentives that operate upon him in the environment.

Aiding in this twentieth century process of undermining objective moral principles was a philosophical doctrine of Logical Positivism, which sought in the name of objective scientific inquiry to establish a radical distinction between facts and values. Facts existed in the objective realm of research and observation. Values were assigned to the subjective category of feelings, preferences, and tastes. This attitude became especially pervasive in educational fields as schools and universities could

find no basis for including a place for morality within secular sciences. Values were thought to be inherently unscientific, more akin to religious faith. Moral education was thus perceived to involve indoctrination, and thought of as entirely inconsistent with principles of cultural diversity and intellectual objectivity.

## SOURCES OF MORALITY: THE RETURN TO NATURAL LAW

Given the doubt and confusion that immediately surrounds an effort to “revive” or “restore” moral values, questions regarding the source of morality must be taken seriously. Confusion over what moral education and character development can contribute turn quickly to arguments over the question of whose values should be upheld?

To what authoritative sources do we turn for moral guidance?

## RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICE

One source of moral principles, and by far the most widely understood, is religious belief. Religious believers are usually quite clear on what is ethically right and wrong and do not need laws to guide their conduct across a host of behaviors — violence, killing, or simply being unkind to people, for example. They are motivated to do good and avoid evil, not merely to comply with a public law or to please people, but because there are divine sanctions which they violate at the risk of their own souls.

But while religion is an important influence and its place within public institutions and places is always being debated, advocates of religiously grounded morality often make the mistake of implying that there are no other foundations for moral life outside of revealed religion. Moreover, efforts to revive public morality based upon religious appeals can quickly be dismissed as sectarian, the effect of which is to mobilize those who think the moral enterprise is faulty on church-state grounds. Religious foundations for moral life are important,

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especially in a society so thoroughly religious as America, but they are not the only foundations.

## UNIVERSAL MORAL PRINCIPLES: NATURAL LAW

One can explore every corner of the globe and every segment of the human race and find remarkable unanimity regarding what is philosophically called “the good.” Even where vast cultural differences exist, there is little disagreement over the characteristics of a good person, a good neighbor, a good community, or a good society. No one wants to be treated discourteously, much less barbarously.

Many moral claims are self-evidently true: for example, that honesty and kindness are good, and that a long series of offenses against mankind and

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nature are wrong: murder, slavery, sexual exploitation, spouse or child abuse, slaughtering endangered species, or dumping toxic substances into streams. These things are simply wrong, anywhere and under all circumstances. There is no known society in the world that does not consider Mother Teresa a

saintly hero, and Hitler a heinous murderer. Things may blur a bit when we enter less clear-cut categories, but the point here is that moral assertions have always been made, and must be made.

John M. Cooper offers this summary:

The peoples of the world, however much they differ as to details of morality, hold universally, or with practical universality, to at least the following basic precepts. Respect the Supreme Being or the benevolent being or beings that take his place. Do not “blaspheme.” Care for your children. Malicious murder or maiming, stealing, deliberate slander, or “black lying, when committed against friend or unoffending fellow clansman or tribesman, are reprehensible. Adultery proper is wrong, even though there are may be exceptional circumstances that permit or enjoin it and even though sexual relations among the unmarried may be viewed leniently. Incest is a heinous offense. This universal moral code agrees rather closely with our own Decalogue taken in a strictly literal sense.”<sup>12</sup>

For those concerned that a system of values cannot be constructed or taught without favoring one religion or culture over another, they have not considered the support that various faith traditions, operating within diverse cultural settings, have given to moral principles.

Support for natural law and natural morality can be found in all religious traditions. C.S. Lewis, himself a devout Christian, pointed out in *The Abolition of Man* that there are certain universal ideas of right and wrong that recur in the writings of ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese, Norse, Indians, and Greeks, along with Anglo-Saxon and American writings. Lewis called these transcendent principles the Tao, a term borrowed from the Chinese that means simply “the way.”

Rooted in the laws of nature, the Tao is a road that leads to the good life, and to harmony with nature and its maker. The concept bases such moral imperatives as the care for the young and veneration of the old, not on subjective human psychology, but in universal principles of justice that transcend individuals and cultures.

Among these universal laws, according to Lewis, are the laws of beneficence, of justice, of good faith and veracity, of mercy, of magnanimity, and of duty to family. That these core principles emerged around the globe and throughout the millennia, independent of one another, on vastly different soil, producing the same successful civilizations regardless of race or religion, confirms Lewis’ suggestion that they are rooted in natural laws of the universe, not just Judeo-Christian doctrines found in divine revelation, for example.

These universal principles embodied what Lewis called “a common human law of action which can overreach rules and ruled alike.” Belief in the Tao is necessary to “the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny.”<sup>13</sup> To abandon them, says Lewis, is to sap a civilization of its dynamism, creativity, and coherence. When societies abandon the Tao, according to Lewis, they produce “men without chests,” of whom society vainly expects “virtue and enterprise.” To step outside the Tao, says Lewis, is to have “stepped into the void” — it is socially suicidal.<sup>14</sup>

The common core virtues that C.S. Lewis identifies are not ethnocentric; they span time, cultures, and religions. Many of the purveyors of these human values on the American continent, though

European and predominantly Christian, were drawing from a deeper and more diverse well of antiquity than simply European culture. Thus, rather than magnifying differences, the recovery of moral principles that transcend cultures can be applied as the answer to a divisive multiculturalism. The rich heritage and contributions of all immigrant groups can be honored, and no group has a monopoly on virtue or a special exemption from human vice.

America is witnessing something of a revival of interest in the logic and practicality of natural law. Natural law expert Professor J. Budziszewski, states that “Natural Law” appears in the title of at least 26 books published in America over the last two years.<sup>15</sup>

## MORALITY IN OUR COMMON EXPERIENCE

Yet another foundation for ethics can be found in a search for core principles or practicals that require no philosophical training or reflection; we only need to learn from the experience of life. There are “laws of living that can be gleaned from ordinary everyday life.” Stephen Covey, the popular author, maintains that personal effectiveness flows from the consistent application of principles that are universally found in the human experience. Covey describes principles as “deep, fundamental truths, classic truths, generic common denominators. They are tightly interwoven threads running with exactness, consistency, beauty and strength through the fabric of life.”<sup>16</sup>

These principles for living, says Covey, have natural and unavoidable consequences: positive consequences when we are living in harmony with them, negative consequences when we spurn them. They apply to everyone, whether or not they live in awareness of them, but, Covey adds, “the more we know of correct principles, the greater our personal freedom to act wisely.”<sup>17</sup>

Covey uses the example of “the law of the farm.” In nature, the practice of cultivating the land is governed by natural processes and principles, and these principles determine outcomes. He asks, “Can you imagine forgetting to plant in the spring, flaking out all summer, and hitting it hard in the fall — ripping up the soil, throwing in the seeds, watering, cultivating — and expecting to get a bountiful harvest overnight?” Covey maintains that this kind of “cramming” not only fails in the natural world, it ultimately fails in a social system as well. Societies,

Covey says, require careful, conscientious cultivation. In the long run, the “law of the farm” governs in all arenas of life.<sup>18</sup>

## THE HISTORY OF THE GOLDEN RULE

The Golden Rule is well suited as a standard for ordering society because it has roots in a wide range of world cultures and finds expression, in one form or another, in most if not all of the world’s religions, as noted. The origins of the Golden Rule in Christianity are widely known. The first enunciation by Jesus of the Golden Rule is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus states: “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)

The Golden Rule found support throughout the whole of Christian history, including during the middle ages through the teachings of such church fathers as Augustine and Aquinas, during the reformation in the writings of Luther and Calvin, and in modern America where it formed the core of Protestantism’s social creed. Religious commentators have noted that a proper translation of the original Greek (*antbropoi*) in which the Golden Rule was first enunciated confirms that it was intended to govern relations between all people, not merely those of religious believers.

The Golden Rule is not, however, the exclusive product of Christianity, as already noted. Augustine, the great Christian theologian, extolled the Golden Rule as a universal principle that all cultures agreed on, not merely those grounded in revealed religion. Thus, the vision for finding unity via the Golden Rule at the level of social ethics while holding firmly to divergent theological convictions has enjoyed strong Christian backing throughout history, even among those whose doctrinal convictions have run the deepest.

This is true of devout religionists both inside and outside of Christianity. The earliest known religious formulations

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of the Golden Rule go back to Buddha and Confucius. For Confucius, the Golden Rule represented the ideal of character, self-discipline, and the selfless life. Also predating Christianity was the Jewish moral law and wisdom literature, which was replete with encouragement to pursue good and avoid evil through various maxims regarding family life, charity, and faithfulness to God.

In the ancient Hebrew scriptures, the Jewish believer is admonished to combine love of God with neighbor love. The command to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5) was combined with “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), much like the Christian formulation.

If the golden rule offers a basis for ethical unity and nearly universal integration amidst differing religious perspectives, it also operates independent of religion. The ancient Greeks, such as Plato, used reasoning much like that of the Golden Rule to develop general rules for the governance of society in such areas as the use of property and the conduct of commercial transactions. Early modern philosophers saw the Golden Rule as reflective of a “natural law,” which existed independent of special revelation or divine grace, and accessible to all by virtue of its grounding in universal laws of nature.

With the rise of Rationalism, philosophers such as Hobbes treated the Golden Rule as a quite important, if not surprisingly useful social convention that

individuals might consent to out of self-interest. Seen this way, individuals are free to apply (or violate) the Golden Rule as they wish in accordance with their own enlightened sense of interest. Those who live by the Golden Rule, Hobbes held, may expect to enjoy its rewards in the form of public praise and kind deeds reciprocated, while violators may be subjected to penalties ranging from social sanctions to personal guilt or loss of self-respect.

Although the Golden Rule has fallen out of widespread use as a basic rule for living, it is still seen by many within the field of ethics, in general terms at least, as a universal moral principle that enables individuals of all demographic backgrounds to engage in reasoned argument and to resolve conflict peacefully and effectively.

## THE GOLDEN RULE IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The golden age of the Golden Rule on the American continent took place at the turn of the twentieth century as public officials, religious leaders, and businessmen alike popularized the Golden Rule as a means of coping with pressing social and moral conditions, including income disparities between rich and poor, urban squalor or rampant individualism.

Starting in the late 1900s, America found herself in the midst of numerous popular movements to promote the application of the Golden Rule, privately in the form of simple creeds, and publicly through literature, speeches, and popular slogans. The drive

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ous lay movements throughout the Christian and civic community at the time, emphasizing the application of the Golden Rule.

Many businesses adopted the Golden Rule as their motto, seeking to accentuate the quality of a product or service, to display high ethical principle in the treatment of workers, or to merely advance civic improvement by means of promoting the brotherhood and service of mankind. Much of this public interest in the Golden Rule was inspired by a robust Protestantism that linked the simple logic of the Golden Rule to a social gospel of human betterment.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the Golden Rule has diverse religious as well as secular progeny and has functioned to promote human respect and dignity through human history. Though circumstances point to the possibility of a renewed embrace of the Golden Rule, and there are small signs of an awakening, no major movement has yet been launched to achieve its revitalization. The Golden Rule offers a simple, universal principle for a global community in search of unifying ideals.

## ORGANIZING A GOLDEN RULE MOVEMENT

To revive interest in the Golden Rule in today's secular, pluralistic, and technological society, what models of action would be available to promote positive social change grounded in the Golden Rule? A Golden Rule movement would be organized around the popular model of society-wide "social movement," which seeks to achieve positive social change through voluntary, non-political means and by methods designed to affect personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Such an initiative would be a broad-based, public education and awareness-raising initiative, enlisting opinion leaders across numerous fields and disciplines to participate in its work.

Values can and do shift in response to well-conceived, well-orchestrated efforts to affect attitudes and behaviors, centered especially on the recruitment of an ideologically diverse range of opinion leaders, as we have learned from numerous other social initiatives.

A public initiative centering on the Golden Rule would encourage the widest possible adoption of the Golden Rule, in both the public and private

sectors, as the most basic and universal life principle available for the ordering of human society. The social movement model, unlike models for political change, is ideologically diverse and targets social and cultural centers of influence rather than the law-making process. The social movement contains elements (i.e., key opinion leaders) designed to affect elite fields and disciplines as well as grass roots

movements. In short, this model of social change works within cultural and social mechanisms and is guided by up-to-date theories of how social values and attitudes take shape.

A Golden Rule initiative would recruit leaders from the key sectors of society — religion, politics, education, business, philanthropy, youth, civic, sports, and entertainment. These leaders would be coordinators and spokespersons within their sectors, developing sector-wide educational programs designed to raise awareness of the Golden Rule, as well as the practical tools for applying it. Those educational tools would include such things as public message campaigns, pledges, forums, resolutions, and public declarations.

A Golden Rule initiative would attempt to get businesses to adopt the Golden Rule as part of their marketing programs, incorporating the symbol and message of the Golden Rule in products and communications. Retailers could be urged to incorporate the Golden Rule message into point-of-purchase transactions. Restaurants could be encouraged to produce Golden Rule inserts in their window sales and table placements. School boards and school principals could be presented a short guide to turning their institutions into "Golden Rule Schools." Little League Baseball clubs will be provided a "Golden Rule Guide to Good Sportsmanship."

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Each period in American history has witnessed the rise of well-conceived, carefully orchestrated public initiatives to promote a positive social good as the antidote to a particular social condition. The latter half of the twentieth century, for example, saw the rise of a civil rights movement which fundamentally altered how Americans think about race; a women's movement which dramatically shifted attitudes regarding the importance of women in all spheres of society; and an environmental movement which has shifted public sympathies in favor of conserving land, air and water, and so on. Many other popular movements and campaigns have achieved deep and broad impact on such problems as smoking, drunk driving, or drug and alcohol abuse prevention, and family preservation.

## CONCLUSION

That there is a deep and broad desire on the part of large majorities of the American people to restore at least minimal moral principles and laws for society has been well established. Drawing from America's rich and dynamic history of confronting moral and social problems through voluntary movements, a society-wide movement in the 21st century aimed at organizing civil society around the foundational principle of the Golden Rule could go far to humanize and harmonize what many have come to regard as a brutal and heartless society.

## ENDNOTES

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6. Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 45
7. Lickona, *Educating for Character*, 234.
8. Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community*, 12
9. Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community*, 24.
10. James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 2.
11. J. Budziszewski, "Natural Born Lawyers," *The Weekly Standard*, December 20, 1999, 31.
12. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 84.
13. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 77.
14. J. Budziszewski, "Natural Born Lawyers," 1.
15. Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Effective People* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989) 122.
16. Covey, *The Seven Habits*, 123.
17. Covey, *The Seven Habits*, 55.
18. For more read Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

**Introducing Our Author:*****Don Eberly***

Don Eberly is a nationally recognized voice on issues of citizenship and community, and a leading contributor to the growing debate over how to strengthen social institute in America. His writings on issues of society and culture include dozens of essays and articles and six books, most recently *America's Promise: Civil Society and the Renewal of American Culture*. Don has founded or co-founded several nationally recognized initiatives promoting civic, democratic and economic renewal, including the Che Civil Society Project and the National Fatherhood Initiative, a non-partisan civic initiative seeking to renew responsible fatherhood in American society.

Don is an affiliate scholar at the Institute for American Values, a fellow at the George Gallup International Institute, and a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He has held key staff positions in Congress and the White House, and regularly advises senior officials in national and state government.

His work has been covered by many of the major media outlets in the country, including the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, the *L.A. Times*, *National Public Radio* and *CNN*. He speaks regularly to business, civic, and policy groups. Don holds graduate degrees from George Washington University and Harvard University.