Table of Contents

[The What, Why and Hows of Ethics ? 1](#_Toc138799578)

[**What:** 1](#_Toc138799579)

[**Why:** 1](#_Toc138799580)

[**How:** 1](#_Toc138799581)

[The Golden Rule of Ethics 2](#_Toc138799582)

# The What, Why and Hows of Ethics?

Ethics play a crucial role in the construction and functioning of society. They act as a sort of moral compass, guiding individuals towards behavior that is considered acceptable, fair, and just.

**What:**

Ethics, at its core, are principles that govern a person's or group's behavior. They are the standards by which we determine what is right and wrong, good and bad. These moral principles influence our decisions and actions, shaping how we interact with others and the world around us.

Ethics in society touch on many areas, including law, politics, medicine, science, business, and more. For example, they dictate that stealing is wrong, that we should treat others with respect, and that we have certain responsibilities towards the environment. They also guide professional conduct, ensuring that doctors maintain patient confidentiality, that scientists carry out research responsibly, and that politicians act in the best interest of their constituents.

**Why:**

Ethics are necessary for the smooth functioning of society. They promote a sense of trust and cooperation among individuals, allowing us to live together in communities. Without a shared set of ethical principles, society could descend into chaos, with individuals acting solely in their own self-interest without consideration for others.

Ethics also serve to protect individuals within society. They uphold values such as justice, equality, and respect for human rights, ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and that their dignity is respected. Without ethics, those with power could exploit others without repercussion.

**How:**

Ethics shape society in several ways. They influence our laws, with many legal systems rooted in ethical principles. For instance, the principle that murder is wrong is reflected in laws against homicide.

Ethics also guide social norms and expectations, shaping how we interact with one another on a day-to-day basis. For example, ethical norms dictate that we should tell the truth, respect others' personal space, and help those in need when we can.

Moreover, ethics shape our institutions, from schools and hospitals to businesses and government bodies. They guide professional conduct, establish standards for behavior, and provide a framework for resolving disputes and addressing misconduct.

In addition, ethics inform our personal decisions and actions. They shape our character and influence how we respond to the world around us. Through ethical behavior, we can contribute to a just and harmonious society.

In conclusion, ethics are integral to the construction and maintenance of society. They provide a moral framework that guides our actions, promotes cooperation and trust, protects individuals, and shapes our institutions and communities. Without ethics, society as we know it would not exist.

# The Golden Rule of Ethics

The principle of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is often referred to as the Golden Rule. It is a fundamental precept found in many religious and ethical systems, and it essentially means that one should treat others as one wishes to be treated oneself. This principle can be expressed in a positive or directive form, a negative or prohibitive form, or an empathetic or responsive form. The phrase dates back to early Confucian times (551–479 BCE) and can be found in various forms in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and other major religions​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

The term "Golden Rule" or "Golden law" began to be used widely in the early 17th century in Britain, with the earliest known usage by Anglicans Charles Gibbon and Thomas Jackson in 1604​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

In ancient Egypt, the maxim of reciprocity was reflected in the story of "The Eloquent Peasant" during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1650 BCE). A papyrus from the Late Period (c. 664–323 BCE) contains an early negative affirmation of the Golden Rule: "That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another"​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

The principle was also expressed in the ancient Indian epic Mahābhārata, in which the sage Brihaspati tells the king Yudhishthira about dharma, a philosophical understanding of values and actions that lend good order to life. According to him, "One should never do something to others that one would regard as an injury to one's own self"​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

In the Book of Virtue of the Tirukkuṛaḷ (c. 1st century BCE to 5th century CE), Valluvar says "Do not do to others what you know has hurt yourself" and "Why does one hurt others knowing what it is to be hurt?"​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

The Golden Rule in its prohibitive (negative) form was a common principle in ancient Greek philosophy as well, with various philosophers expressing similar ideas​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

The Pahlavi Texts of Zoroastrianism (c. 300 BCE – 1000 CE) were an early source for the Golden Rule as well: "That nature alone is good which refrains from doing to another whatsoever is not good for itself" and "Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others"​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BCE – 65 CE), a practitioner of Stoicism, expressed a variation of the Golden Rule in his Letter 47: "Treat your inferior as you would wish your superior to treat you"​[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule)​.

In the context of ethics, the Golden Rule provides a fundamental guideline for moral behavior. It encourages empathy and fairness and discourages actions that harm others. It is often used as a simple heuristic to guide ethical decisions and behaviors. It is a principle that has been recognized and valued across different cultures and religions throughout history.