

SPACE

Golden Rule Invalid in Space

The golden rule is a good guide for human relations, but for outer-space relations it needs changing. A new brand of legal specialists is working out the rules.

By ELIZABETH MIREL

► THE GOLDEN RULE will do for earthlings, but for out-of-this-world creatures it will have to be revised.

This is the conclusion of scholars of a Space Age legal specialty called metalaw. Metalaw is based on the belief that disaster would be wreaked upon the universe if man applied his own self-centered rules and regulations to his dealings with beings from outer space.

The idea of metalaw is as old, or as young, as the Space Age.

Meaning of Metalaw

The word was coined by Andrew G. Haley, a Washington lawyer-scientist, in 1956. It comes from the Greek meta, meaning beyond or transcending, and law, which comes from the Old English lagu, meaning a body of binding customs. Thus metalaw means law beyond our present frame of reference. Metalaw is the system for dealing with the beings we will encounter in our exploration of the vast beyond.

Much of the work on metalaw has been done by Mr. Haley, and it is summed up in his recent book *Space Law and Government* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, \$15.00).

The guiding principle of metalaw is to treat others the way they want to be treated, that is, to do unto others as they would have done unto them. It is a reversal of the golden rule.

But why should man give up the golden rule?

It is an eloquent statement of philosophy. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do you even unto them: for this is the law and the prophets (New Testament).

It is a guiding moral principle that has been expressed by sages down through the years—from Confucius to Aristotle, from Seneca to Mohammed.

Even if it does not work all of the time, it is a worthy ideal.

The trouble with the golden rule is that it is too self-centered, or too anthropomorphic. If we apply the rules of man to outer space, we will be contaminating it with all our own earthly faults and foibles. We will be imposing our own standards either on peoples that do not know any better or on peoples that are superior to us.

This would have disastrous results similar to the Spanish destruction of native Mexican and Peruvian civilizations in the 16th century or to the American trampling on native Indian tribes during the time of the westward push.

But in addition, the upset to the balance of nature might be irreparable.

The idea and practice of giving up the golden rule is not exclusive with metalaw specialists. As Mr. Haley points out, many men have spoken the principle of metalaw without giving it that label.

Students of strange cultures try to understand "weird" or even "evil" practices of these lands in terms of their function and meaning for the people as a whole.

This way of thinking is called cultural relativism.

What the metalaw people are advocating is a kind of super cultural relativism. Like cultural relativists, we must not assume that our way of life is any better than the next fellow's, and, beyond this, we must not assume that our species, *Homo sapiens*, is any better than the next species, an imaginary *Homo martian*, *Homo milky-wayan*, or whatever it turns out to be.

Sounds fantastic. But the world of fancy is rapidly turning into the world of fact and we need a system to deal with it.

Just as the basic ethical principle is the golden rule, Mr. Haley explains, so when society got more complicated, the Ten Commandments came along. Just as in our complex modern world "we have so many rules

we don't know what to do with them all," so when our society comes to include relations with extraterrestrial beings we will set up standards.

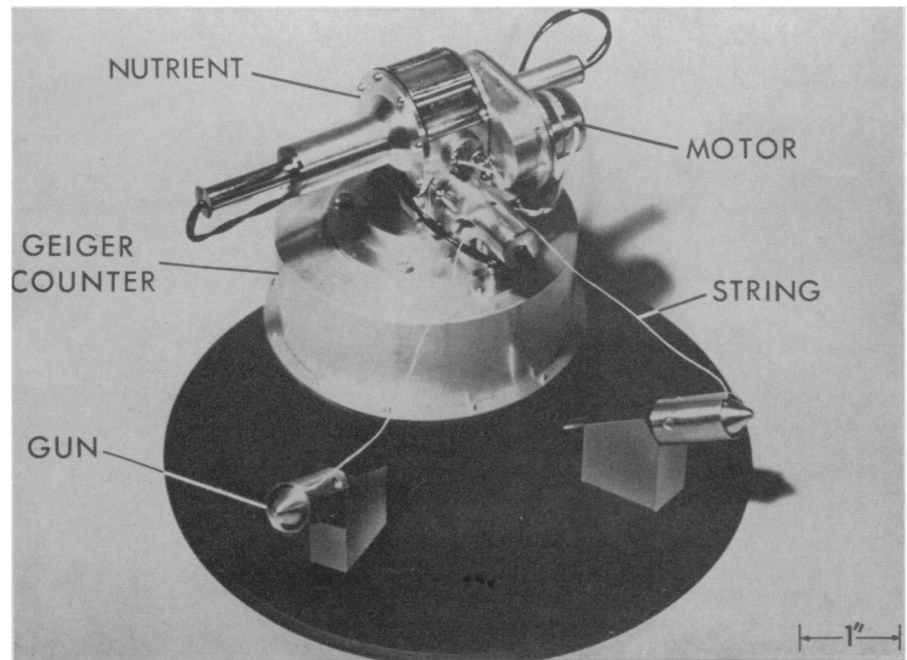
This day of reckoning may not be far away.

Life on Other Planets

Astronomy experts have assessed the possibilities of life on other planets and have found them quite high. Even using a very conservative estimate of the number of stars that like our sun are apt to have planetary systems but granting the many physical and climatic conditions that can support life, there are estimated to be 100 million million planets that are capable of supporting life. Many of them are assumed to have the same kind of plant-animal mutual existence set-up that earthlings do.

With our present level of technology, communication with these far-flung creatures would be impossible—even if we understood their language and even if they spoke a language to begin with. Distances are so great that it might require 100,000 years to get a message back and forth.

But if—and these are big if's—it is true that time moves slower for someone who is traveling close to the speed of light, and if vehicles for such travel could be devised, then a man could visit and return from distant planetary systems in the space granted



GULLIVER TRAVELS—This life detection device of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration called Gulliver will be used on the surfaces of far-off planets. Through the gun's bullets it sends out "sticky strings" which are then reeled back. The strings are drenched with a nutrient broth, enabling bacteria, if they are present, to grow on them. Results, speeded up by radioactivity, can be obtained within four hours and signalled to the earth.