

## Transworld Egoism, Empathy, and the Golden Rule

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*According to preferentism, the 'desire theory' of well-being, one is made better off to the extent that her preferences, or desires, are satisfied. According to narrow preferentism, preferentism as it has traditionally been understood, the preferences that matter in this regard are just actual preferences; preferences we might 'easily have had', do not matter. On this account also, only actual preference satisfaction contributes to well-being. Merely possible preference satisfaction, including the 'real possibility' of attaining desired states of affairs, does not contribute to well-being. Broad preferentism makes sense of the intuition that feasibility as such contributes to well-being. On this account, we are made better off not only by the actual satisfaction of our actual preferences but also by the mere feasibility of satisfying preferences that we 'might easily have had'. In addition to making sense of our intuition that feasibility as such, contributes to our well-being, broad preferentism provides a rationale for altruistic behavior. On this account support policies that benefit worldmates whose actual circumstances are different from our own because their circumstances are the our circumstances at nearby possible worlds, and our circumstances at other possible worlds, affect our own actual well-being.*

According to preferentism, well-being is preference satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> I argue that if we are going to be preferentists we should embrace *broad preferentism*, according to which the merely possible satisfaction of merely possible preferences, as well as the actual satisfaction of our actual preferences, contributes to our well-being. That is to say, *ceteris paribus*, the satisfaction of our preferences at other possible worlds makes us better off.

In Section 1, I discuss the difference between preferentism as traditionally understood, *narrow preferentism*, and *broad preferentism*, according to which mere possibilities in and of themselves may contribute to our well-being or undermine it. I

<sup>1</sup> There is a tendency to use the terms 'preference' and 'desire' interchangeably for elegant variation, and so to call preferentism 'the desire theory'. This is seriously misleading. Desire is a binary relation: an individual desires a state of affairs or a bundle of goods. Preference is a ternary relation: an individual prefers one state of affairs or bundle of goods to another such. Preferentism, therefore, is not an account of well-being as such but rather an account of *relative* well-being, or *betterness*. The higher I climb on my preference ranking, the better off I am.

note that while narrow preferentism may explain why we may, as hedges against changes in our preferences or circumstances, want alternatives that we do not choose to be available, narrow preferentism cannot explain why, even in the absence of such prudential concerns, we still value mere possibilities. Not all mere possibilities, however, contribute to our well-being. I note, in Section 2, that a possible state of affairs, *S*, contributes to our well-being or undermines to a degree commensurate with the distance of the possible world at which it obtains. I argue in Section 3 that broad preferentism provides a rationale for what we should ordinary understand as altruistic behavior which, as I note in Section 4, cannot be motivated by empathy. The most compelling motive for actual world altruism, I suggest, is transworld egoism.

### **Broad Preferentism or Narrow Preferentism?**

Preferentists hold that *ceteris paribus* satisfying our informed preferences makes us better off. According to some preferentists, the frustration or satisfaction of such preferences can harm or benefit us *even if it does not figure in experience*: even if we never discover that our preferences have been frustrated or satisfied and even if we are not significantly affected in any other way. This is the version of preferentism to be defended here.<sup>2</sup>

I don't want people talking about me behind my back, betraying confidences or ridiculing me. Even if their talk never gets back to me, or puts me at any material disadvantage, they harm me: I am less well off than I would otherwise be because my preference for keeping information confidential and being regarded favorably, has been thwarted. I want my property disposed of in a certain way after my death and, if possible, I would like my good name to live after me. If my executor doesn't follow my instructions, or if my reputation suffers after my death, I am less well off. Even if there is no point during my life when I *become* less well-off, my life has gone less well overall than it would have gone if my property had been distributed according to my wishes and my reputation had been untarnished. If this is correct then states of affairs that do not figure in experience, or have causal consequences that do, can contribute to our well-being, or undermine it. And that seems to be a good reason why we should prefer preferentism, which allows for the contribution of states beyond our experience to well-being, to hedonism, which does not.

If however we grant that states of affairs beyond our experience can harm or benefit us in this way, there does not seem to be any compelling reason to exclude merely possible states of affairs from contributing to our well-being or detracting from it. Mere possibilities do not have causal consequences for us since possible worlds are causally isolated. However, according to the preferentist account proposed here the causal disconnect between individuals and merely possible states of affairs does not by itself

<sup>2</sup> I'd suggest that a virtue of preferentism is precisely that it allows us to dispense with the experience requirement. I have argued elsewhere (Harriett E. Baber, 'Ex Ante Desire and Post Hoc Satisfaction', in Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke, and Harry S. Silverstein (Eds), *Time and Identity: Topics in Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), pp. 249-267) that we can be made better or worse off by states of affairs that only come about after our deaths—no theological assumptions required.

disqualify a state of affairs from affecting their well-being for good or for ill.<sup>3</sup> According to the broad preferentism, merely possible states of affairs can indeed harm or benefit us

This seems intuitively correct. Most of us value effective freedom, the feasibility of attaining states of affairs we might desire: intuitively, having options is a good thing even if we never exercise them. The *broad preferentist* account of well-being provides a rationale for this intuition. On this account, the feasibility of satisfying preferences we might easily have, those we have at nearby possible worlds, makes us better off; and the frustration of our preferences at nearby possible worlds makes us worse off.

Intuitions however are not decisive and are, in this case, negotiable. We may prefer to have more options rather than fewer because we are prudent, banking possibilities against the prospect of changes in our circumstances or preferences. To the extent that preference satisfaction contributes to well-being, we want to make sure that *whatever* our preferences turn out to be they will be satisfied—recognizing that our preferences may change. Perhaps more importantly, we want to make sure that if our circumstances change, so that we can no longer get our currently preferred options, we have tolerable fallback positions.

To this extent, however, *narrow preferentism*, according to which well-being consists in the actual satisfaction of actual preferences, will do as well as broad preferentism when it comes to explaining our interest in mere possibilities. Right now I am an academic, the occupation I chose, which is currently, of all feasible options for me, at the top of my preference-ranking. I might, however, get sick of teaching and research. I might come to prefer another line of work and a different life: farming, business management, or construction work. Being prudent, I want these options to be available, just in case. My preference for having these options available is an actual preference, albeit a preference for mere possibilities, and so according to narrow preferentists, its satisfaction contributes to my well-being. In addition, quite apart from possible changes in my preferences, my circumstances may change: I may lose my job. Again, being prudent, I quite reasonably want other tolerable options to be available and, once again, according to narrow preferentists the satisfaction of my *actual* preference for mere possibilities contributes to my well-being.

There is however reason to prefer broad preferentism to narrow preferentism. In addition to providing an account of well-being, broad preferentism suggests a plausible answer to the fundamental question of ethics: ‘Why should I be moral?’<sup>4</sup> If broad preferentism is correct, we should support policies that would make it feasible for us to satisfy our preferences even if things had gone differently for us—to satisfy our preferences at other possible worlds where we are differently situated or have different preferences. On this account, we engage in altruistic behavior because even if it does not in any straightforward way promote our actual interests, or provide a hedge against

<sup>3</sup> Not all bringing about is causal bringing about. There are, notoriously, changes that are mere Cambridge. More to the point, objects have modal properties in virtue of states of affairs that obtain at other, causally isolated, possible worlds. The broad preferentist claim is that such properties can make one better or worse off.

<sup>4</sup> This, of course, poses a further question: what is it to be moral? I assume, crudely and controversially, that to be moral is to behave in such a way as to maximize utility which, on the current account, is to maximize possibilities for preference satisfaction. Even one holds that this isn’t the whole, or even the better part, of morality it is, arguably, some part of morality, and the current account, I suggest, provides motivation for that part.

future changes in our preferences or circumstances, it benefits us (or our counterparts) at other possible worlds and, to that extent, makes us *actually* better off.<sup>5</sup> The basis for morality, on the broad preferentist account, is transworld egoism. We promote policies to benefit world-mates who are unlike us because we have an interest in benefitting ourselves at other possible worlds, where we are like them.

### **'Real Possibilities': Feasibility**

Not all logically possible states of affairs contribute to well-being. Intuitively, a state of affairs makes an individual better off if it satisfies her preferences at the actual world or at 'nearby' possible worlds, where her tastes are similar and so are reflected in preferences she 'could easily have had'. At any world, *w*, what I choose over other available alternatives, given all relevant information and after due deliberation, is what I prefer. There are other options which I choose at other nearby possible worlds. My preferences at nearby worlds, including *w* itself, are my pro-attitudes at *w*. All my preferences are pro-attitudes, and all my pro-attitudes are preferences at some world or other, but not all my pro-attitudes at *w* are preferences at *w*. Nevertheless, on the current account the satisfaction of my preferences at nearby possible worlds makes me better off at *w*. I am better off when I can satisfy preferences that I have at nearby possible worlds – preferences that I 'could easily have had'.<sup>6</sup>

I have no interest in gourmet cooking: I prefer other leisure activities. Nevertheless, given my tastes and preoccupations, I know that I could easily get hooked on cooking. Fancy kitchen equipment, pots, and crockery appeal to me and I occasionally fanaticize a kitchen with strings of onions and garlic hanging from the ceiling. The possible world at which I prefer gourmet cooking to my current hobbies is nearby so that activity is relevant to me. I have no interest in the ballet either but, given my tastes, there is no way that I could get hooked. Once, forced to attend a performance, I found it as excruciating as a transatlantic flight in a middle seat. The world at which I prefer ballet is remote, so ballet-going is not relevant to me.

The possibility of attaining states that are relevant to us makes us better off to a degree commensurate with the distance of the worlds at which those states of affairs obtain and the worlds at which we prefer the states of affairs in question. That is to say, possible states of affairs make us better off only if they are states of affairs that we prefer, or 'could easily prefer' given our psychology and circumstances – and only to the extent that they are feasible and.

Some possibilities are too remote to affect my welfare. The *logical possibilities* for me are endless: I could be fabulously wealthy; I could be a Nobel Prize winning physicist; I could fly. But these states of affairs obtain at remote possible worlds, worlds beyond the neighborhood of feasibility, and so, even if I might desire them, they do not make me better off. Such states are not relevant to my well-being. It is the states of affairs that

<sup>5</sup> I shall talk about how things are with *us* at other possible worlds as shorthand for how they are with 'us or our otherworldly personal counterparts'. For the purposes of this discussion of broad preferentism nothing hangs on how we understand the metaphysics of modality.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this journal for pointing out the role of pro-attitudes.

obtain at nearby possible worlds that affect my welfare for good or ill. A possible state of affairs benefits me to the extent that it is *feasible*.

Waiting at the international terminal I scan the board showing arrivals and departures. There are flights going to any number of exotic locations, from Abu Dhabi to Zanzibar, and I am thrilled to realize that I *could* go to any of these places. That is more than a merely logical possibility: I have a high enough limit on my credit card to get a business class flight to any of these places *right now*. The thought thrills me. I will not in fact go to any of these places but, I believe, the mere fact that I *could* in the requisite sense go there, the fact that going to these places is feasible for me, contributes to my well-being. Remote logical possibilities do not benefit me, but nearby possibilities, states of affairs that it is feasible for me to obtain, do.

There are however nearby possibilities that have do not contribute to my well-being because the worlds at which I prefer these states of affairs are remote. As Sen notes, while the capability of achieving valued 'functionings', as well as their actual attainment, makes us better off the feasibility of attaining, what he calls, 'bad, awful and gruesome' outcomes does not.<sup>7</sup> My bad, awful, and gruesome outcomes are states of affairs that I only prefer at remote possible worlds and which, at closer possible worlds, I prefer to avoid. I *could* be a homeless person, trucking my possessions around in a shopping cart, begging at freeway entrances, and sleeping rough. That is feasible: there is a nearby-possible world where that is my life. However, worlds at which I *prefer* that life are remote and so that option is to me bad, awful, and gruesome.

Naturally, the feasibility of attaining states I *actually* prefer contributes most to my well-being, since the actual world is closest to itself. However the feasibility of attaining states that I could 'easily prefer'—those that I prefer at nearby possible worlds—also contributes. Close to my home there are beaches, parks, and a wide range of restaurants and bars which I do not frequent but which I might easily want to visit. The availability of these amenities contributes to my well-being. The possibility of achieving states that I only prefer at remote worlds possible worlds, where my psychology is radically different, does not. My aversion to any activity for which I have to sit in an audience is modally deep: given my tastes, possible worlds at which I enjoy going to the movies, to concerts, or to sporting events are remote. The availability of movie theaters, concert halls, and sports stadiums in my area, therefore, does not contribute to my well-being.

On the current account, mere possibilities can make us better off. While remote possibilities do not contribute to our well-being or detract from it, states of affairs at nearby possible worlds have import for us. Having the option of getting what we want, or could easily come to want, contributes to our well-being even if we do not exercise that option.

<sup>7</sup> Amartya Sen, 'Capability and Well-being', in *The Quality of Life*, edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 30-53, at p. 34.

### Transworld Egoism

The benefit I get from non-actual states of affairs provides a rational basis for actual-world altruism.<sup>8</sup> As a transworld egoist I support arrangements in virtue of which I am better off at nearby possible worlds – arrangements, which as it happens, benefit others at the actual world who are differently situated from me.<sup>9</sup> I therefore work to see to it that they are not forced into arrangements that they find intolerable. Even though I am safe, even though there is no realistic chance that I will in the future find myself in a predicament that I would find intolerable, I still *could* have been in that pickle – and that nearby possibility undermines my actual well-being.

As a matter of fact, in my current circumstances, I do not have to worry about the prospects most job-seekers face in the labor market. My academic job is secure and the probability that I will, in the future, lose my taste for teaching and research is negligible. The possible world at which I will, in the future, be seeking alternative employment is remote. I am safe – and I know it. So narrow preferentism cannot explain my interest in seeing to it that the labor market is fair, and that applicants have decent options. But I *do* care about fairness. I might not have been hired for my current position: there is a nearby possible world at which I am on the job market. If, at that world, I cannot get work for which I am qualified because of unfair hiring practices, then I am actually less well off. In light of that possibility I want job applicants to be treated fairly.

<sup>8</sup> 'Altruism' as understood here, is the propensity, *regardless of motives*, to behave in ways that benefit others even if they do not materially benefit the agent. I pitch pocket change into the Salvation Army bell-ringer's bucket at my local supermarket entrance. I might have any one of a range of motives: I want the warm glow, I want to get rid of loose change, I want my neighbors to think well of me or, perhaps, I want to improve the lives of Salvation Army clients. It does not matter what my motives are: that is altruism in the loose and popular sense assumed here.

<sup>9</sup> It may be suggested that transworld egoism yields a morality that is unacceptably biased. 'As a middle aged white man', a referee writes, the possible worlds in which I'm a woman are very remote, as are the possible worlds in which I'm young, black etc. In my eyes BP would therefore justify a morality that is biased towards middle aged white men.' First, arguably, this worry is an expression of modal provincialism. The logical space of possible worlds is infinite. It includes remote worlds where the stuff of the universe, or at least the universe we occupy, never congealed into discrete objects, worlds where miracles happen as a matter of course, and much closer to home, worlds where a 'normal' middle-aged white male desires to have a healthy limb. Leaving aside worries about necessity or origin, worlds at which he is female, or black, are relatively close by so, on the current account, what goes on at those worlds is relevant for him. Any bias is miniscule: worlds at which the laws of nature are the same, miracles don't happen, the course of evolution and human history are as they are with us, and we have the same pro-attitudes that we have at the actual world, are nearby. Secondly, it may be that minimal bias is warranted. We care more for our children than for other people's children, even though, as civilized people, we recognize an obligation to other people's children as well. We set moral priorities. Because I am, at the actual world, a woman and because my greatest fear is boredom, the moral agenda that is most important to me is the promotion of policies that will make it possible for women to avoid boring pink-collar work. The world where I am cashiering at Walmart is a hair's breadth away. But worlds at which I am a young, black male vulnerable to police brutality, a working class white male with no viable career options, or a citizen of the Global South, even if slightly more distant, are also nearby and so it is in my transworld egoistic interest to promote policies that contribute to their well-being.

Of course (almost) anything is *logically possible*. Currently in the US, 'survivalists' concerned about what they take to be the immanent threat of nuclear or biological terrorism, environmental disaster, the violent revolt of racial and religious minorities, and economic collapse, have headed for remote areas where they are stockpiling food, household supplies, and weapons. I am not doing that because I do not think that the apocalyptic scenario they envisage is a serious future possibility. The possible world at which the future they imagine plays out is, I believe, remote. Likewise, I believe that the possible world at which I, in the future, will be looking for work is equally remote. Nevertheless, the worlds at which things *have gone* differently for me from the beginning are too close for comfort. I might not have gone to college, or had the ability to complete an academic program successfully; I might not have gotten an academic job. That is not just logically possible: it is a 'real possibility', a way that things could easily have played out.

Though it is highly unlikely that, in the future, I will be compelled do boring, menial work I could easily *have been* one of the two-thirds of adult women in the US who are not college graduates and whose job options are therefore *de facto* restricted to a narrow range of pink-collar occupations. When I go through the supermarket checkout I never fail to reflect on how easily I could have been behind that check-out counter doing a mindless, repetitious task, confined to a 2 foot by 2 foot space for most of the day. The possible world at which I am a supermarket checker is nearby. I therefore support the enforcement of regulations prohibiting discrimination in employment and the implementation of affirmative action policies, in order to make the worlds at which I am forced to do boring pink-collar work more remote.

When workmen come to come to refinish my wood floors, unclog my toilets or shore up my sagging front porch, I am painfully aware that I could not have gotten any of the jobs they have. While women have entered what were formerly male preserves in management and the professions, sex segregation remains virtually undiminished in the occupations available to the majority of Americans, who are not college graduates. In traditional blue-collar occupations—auto mechanics, plumbing, house painting, construction and the like, women's participation is still negligible.<sup>10</sup> The possible world at which I, as a woman, am working construction or driving a tow truck is remote. I have no romantic illusions about such occupations and most certainly prefer my academic job to blue-collar work. However, I would rather do manual labor than work as school teacher, nurse or secretary, retail sales person, child care worker, cashier, or waitress. At worlds in which I have not secured an academic position but manual labor is available I will choose

<sup>10</sup> Ariane Hegewisch, Hannah Liepmann, Jeff Hayes, and Heidi Hartmann, *Separate and Not Equal? Gender Segregation in the Labor Market and the Gender Wage Gap* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2010). See also the current data available at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics here: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm> (accessed 2017-01-03). The percentage of female employees in most traditional blue-collar occupations is either in low single digits or, in more than half of disaggregated job titles, too low to report. The natural experiment of World War II employment, when women flocked to defense plants and shipyards to take 'men's jobs', strongly suggests that women's underrepresentation in these occupations does not reflect women's preferences. According to a Women's Bureau report, over 90 percent of wartime-employed women wanted to continue working in the occupations in which they had been employed during the war, though immediately afterward, employers refused to rehire women (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/7027/> (accessed 2017-01-03)).

it over any of these pink-collar jobs. Such worlds, however, are remote: because I am a woman, blue-collar work is not available to me as a fallback position. And, on the current account, the absence of fallback positions makes me worse off.

I escaped pink-collar work by the skin of my teeth. There are nearby possible worlds, where I have the pro-attitudes and aversions I actually have but do not have a college degree or the ability to get one and cannot get any of the blue-collar jobs that would make it possible for me to avoid the pink-collar work that I find intolerable. I am a bird in a gilded modal cage: at the actual world things are fine for me but I have no tolerable alternatives. Because of that, on the current account, I am *actually* less well off than I would be if I had more options.

Here intuitions differ. Suppose I live in a large enclosure stocked with all earthly delights and so large that I do not realize it is an enclosure. Am I as well off as I would be if I were free? Life in a gilded cage may be better than a less gilded life outside but is it as good *all other things being equal* as an uncaged life? Is freedom, understood as the availability of a wide range of options, intrinsically valuable? I have an unshakable conviction that mere possibilities make me better off and am willing to pay for them. I pay extra for aisle seats on the plane so that I can easily get up and walk around. Some passengers who buy aisle seats are betting that they will want to get up at sometime during the flight. If they get through the flight without getting up they regret what they regard as a waste of their money. When I buy an aisle seat however, even if I don't get up, I consider the money I paid well spent: I believe that the *mere possibility* of getting up was worth paying for. And I believe that the *mere impossibility* of getting blue-collar work makes me worse off.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Arguably, this taste for mere possibilities is not a personal peculiarity. 'Donald Trump didn't "hoodwink" his voters, says professor who has spent nearly a decade researching them', a recent *Washington Post* article (by Jeff Guo, November 15, 2016. Available online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/15/donald-trump-didnt-hoodwink-his-voters-says-professor-whos-spent-nearly-a-decade-researching-them/?utm\\_term=.f197c7d23113](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/15/donald-trump-didnt-hoodwink-his-voters-says-professor-whos-spent-nearly-a-decade-researching-them/?utm_term=.f197c7d23113) (accessed 2017-01-03), includes the following dialogue between the researcher and a working class respondent in rural Wisconsin:

'Before Obamacare I couldn't afford health insurance, so if Trump gets rid of that, I don't know what I'm going to do. But the thing that really gets us is having to pay a fine unless we get health insurance.'

So I said, 'Even though Obamacare is actually saving you money, you think it's bad because you're being told you must buy health insurance?'

He said, 'Yes.'

The author reflects: 'I think it really shows that people are pretty self-aware [...] But they also recognize the costs. And to them, the costs – to their freedom, for instance – feel like they outweigh the benefits'. This sentiment is pervasive in American political discourse. Voters on the right regularly trade off actual benefits for mere possibilities in the interests of 'freedom' – just as I trade off actual trips to exotic locations and other goods for money in the bank, which is the permanent possibility of preference-satisfaction. Speculatively, working class Americans in particular value 'freedom' because they have experienced pervasive constraint – and elite pundits, by and large, don't get it because they haven't.



### The Limits of Empathy

I have no interest either in making personal contact with the supermarket checker who scans my groceries or in making her life better. I feel no empathy. I recognize however that I could easily have been in her position. I therefore support policies that promote her interests, and I treat her *as I would want to be treated* if I were in her position because I am concerned about *my* well-being at nearby possible worlds at which I have no other career options. I, therefore, support policies that would, *per accidens*, make *her* life better.

Currently there is an interest in the role of empathy as a source of moral sentiment and behavior. Jesse Prinz, in a recent volume devoted to exploring philosophical and psychological perspectives on empathy argues that it is not necessary for morality and, indeed, can cloud our moral judgments. He notes that empathy in the ordinary sense is ‘not very motivating’ and moreover that ‘empathy may lead to preferential treatment [...] be subject to unfortunate biases including cuteness effects [...] be easily manipulated [and] prone to in-group biases.’<sup>12</sup> Concern for how things go for me at other possible worlds does a better job of motivating altruistic behavior that is not subject to these biases.

I do not empathize with working class people, or like them. I do not ‘feel their pain’ and have no desire to make their lives better. But whenever I go through a check-out line or order merchandise over the phone I am painfully aware that I escaped their fate by the skin of my teeth—that I could easily have been one of them, trapped in a 2 foot by 2 foot space scanning groceries or stuck in a carrel taking phone orders. I therefore work to promote policies that benefit them—not because I have any interest in their well-being but because I could have been in their position.

The proximity or worlds where my counterparts are doing pink-collar work because they have no other options undermines my actual well-being: I escaped this fate but, arguably, I would be better off if it hadn’t been such a close call. I have an interest in modal safety: even if I will never have my back to the wall with no room to maneuver, even if I will never be poor and unable to extricate myself from poverty, even if I will never be forced either to beg at the freeway entrance, starve, or work at a job I find intolerable, I am less well off in virtue of the fact I am unavoidably in this predicament at nearby possible worlds.

Thought experiments by Rawls and Harsanyi, in which we are asked to imagine making choices behind a Veil of Ignorance or living the lives of everyone in turn, give us a heuristic for deciding which policies we ought to adopt and how we ought to behave. But they do not tell us *why* we should do what we ought to do—why we should be moral. Behind the Veil of Ignorance I hedge my bets because I do not know whether I will be smart or dumb, rich or poor, living in an affluent country or in the Global South. The thought experiment gives me an idea of what I ought to do in the interests of fairness, *but not why, once the Veil is lifted, I should be fair*. When the Veil is lifted, and I know that I was born smart and rich, that (as an adult) I am well-educated, and that I live in an affluent country, why should I give two straws about people who are differently situated? Why

<sup>12</sup> Jesse J. Prinz, ‘Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?’, in Peter Goldie and Amy Coplan (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 211-229, at p. 225.

should I support policies that promote fairness and, in particular, policies that benefit the least well-off when I am not among them and there is no real possibility that I ever will be?

Neither empathy nor prudence as narrow preferentists would understand it drive me. The current broad preferentist account, however, provides a rationale. Actual world altruism is, effectively, possible world egoism. I should, out of self-interest, support policies (and act according to rules) which, *de facto*, benefit worldmates whose actual circumstances are different from my own because their circumstances are my counterparts' circumstances at nearby possible worlds, and the circumstances of my counterparts at other possible worlds, the way things could be for me, according to the current account, affect my actual well-being. Because I live in circumstances where I could easily have ended up begging at my local freeway entrance, I am actually less well off than I would be in a social democratic welfare state where there is no nearby possibility that anyone, including me, will be *forced* to do that. And that is why I support the establishment of a social democratic welfare state, with social safety nets guaranteeing that citizens will never be forced into poverty or forced to do jobs they find intolerable. 'No man is an island entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'<sup>13</sup>

I am involved in mankind and insofar as there are people (at my world) who have few options and must live lives that I would find intolerable, I am diminished. I therefore support policies that benefit the least well off, not because I care for them or have any interest in their well-being as such, but because I recognize that I could easily have been one of them.

### **Conclusion: The Golden Rule**

On this account, it is in our interest to adopt actual world policies that benefit our counterparts at nearby possible worlds – which, consequently, benefit our worldmates. This is not a new law but an old one: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Consider the way in which your otherworldly counterparts wish to be treated and treat worldmates who are similarly situated accordingly. This is what the Golden Rules prescribes, and Transworld Egoism provides the rationale.

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<sup>13</sup> From John Donne's 'Meditation XVII', in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*.

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