De Ethica

A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics

Vol. 3, No. 3 (2016)

D E E T H I C A

A JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

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De Ethica was founded in 2013. It published its first issue in 2014, under the guidance of its first Editor-in-Chief, distinguished professor Brenda Almond.

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From the Editors

The three articles in this issue discuss very different topics, but there is a common style of argumentation that unites them. All three articles question established dividing lines between philosophical camps, and all three thus open up ways for unconventional inquiry.

Ben Davies' article on *Utilitarianism and Animal Cruelty* challenges the widely accepted notion that veganism (as a practical standpoint) and utilitarianism (as a moral theory) go hand in hand. Davies argues that veganism is, in some ways, more radical than utilitarianism commands, and might in other ways be less effective. For instance, while vegans and utilitarians might agree on the immorality of eating (factory-farmed) meat, their opinion could diverge drastically on other instances of animal cruelty, such as extremely painful medical testing. Furthermore, utilitarians would worry about the difference that individual vegans can make (when it comes to large social and economic structures like meat production and consumption) and they might be willing to consider that some instances of exploitation of animals could be justified in light of the very specific pleasures they provide humans (we could think here of the use of animals in sport, for instance).

Harriet Baber, in her article *Transworld Egoism, Empathy, and the Golden Rule* argues that thinking about counterparts in other possible worlds – who are very much, but not quite like us – could provide us with an egoistic rationale for altruistic policies. Baber starts with the distinction of narrow and broad preferentialism – where narrow preferentialism only takes into account of the desire I do in fact have, and broad preferentialism even takes into account preferences I easily *could* have, given my psychological make-up as it is here and now. Broad preferentialism allows us to formulate a preference-based egoism in which I have a motivation to benefit even those counterparts of mine who are very much like me, but do not have the exact same desires. This, according to Baber, amounts to an egoistic justification of the Golden Rule: If I have an interest to treat such counterparts like I treat myself, then I do have a reason to treat everyone who is like me in relevant respects like I treat myself.

Augustin Fragnière, in his article *Ecological Limits and the Meaning of Freedom* considers the supposed conflict that arises when sustainability goals are imposed on individuals and thus clash with their liberty. It is a common argument of skeptics of ecological and sustainable policies that such policies infringe on important liberty rights (and that sustainability goals would thus be better pursued by providing incentives rather than by rules and regulations). Fragnière argues that this conflict does not occur for every philosophical concept of liberty – and he suggests Philip Pettit's account of liberty as non-domination as one that is actually compatible with stringent „green" policies.

As I mentioned above, what I think these contribution have in common is that they challenge established 'truths' about which moral foundations can (or cannot) undergird specific ethical practices. 'Utilitarianism is a theory for vegans', 'Egoists cannot care about others', or 'Environmentalists care little about individual liberties' – these commonplaces are put into question in this volume. And I think that in light of recent events inside and outside academia, the general thought we can perhaps take away from this volume – and its unifying theme – is to not take established truths for granted, since they are so easily destroyed by those who care nothing for truth.

Those who believed that someone like Donald Trump could never become president of a democratic country were proven wrong; as were those who believed he would change his abrasive and mendacious political tactics once in office. Democracies all over the world are in peril, and Europeans are waking up to the fact that a democracy does not simply maintain itself. The emerging radical right in Central Europe, spearheaded by Marine Le Pen and the *Alternative für Deutschland*, does not play by the established rules of democratic discourse – and 'fact-checking' will not be enough to counter them.

In academia, funding becomes scarcer, employment becomes more precarious, and grants and prizes become more competitive by the year – and many young scholars are realizing that the university cannot offer them a perspective for their professional future. Contemporary universities are no longer protected spaces for the unfettered search for scientific or moral truth. They are increasingly run like businesses and their employees are forced to adapt to this new reality.

One might be tempted to counter the hopelessness and the fear that reigns in academia and in international politics at this time by even more competitiveness and defensiveness. But if there is a general lesson to draw from the papers assembled here, 'business as usual' is not it. All three papers urge us to think unconventionally, to not rely on established dividing lines; and two papers, at least, also make a case for 'surprising allies'.

Applied to politics, this can be taken as an urge to look for all who would defend liberal democracy – across party lines. Applied to academia, this can be taken as a call for real solidarity among those who work in precarious positions – as opposed to mere (and often meaningless) 'collaboration'.

From the Editors

Die drei in dieser Ausgabe versammelten Artikel besprechen sehr unterschiedliche Themen, aber sie haben eine gemeinsame Argumentationslinie, die sie miteinander verbindet. Alle drei Artikel hinterfragen etablierte Trennlinien zwischen den philosophischen Parteien und eröffnen so neue Wege der Reflektion.

Ben Davies' Beitrag *Utilitarianism and Animal Cruelty* hinterfragt die weitgehend akzeptierte Auffassung, dass Veganismus (als praktischer Standpunkt) und Utilitarismus (als Moraltheorie) Hand in Hand gehen. Davies argumentiert, dass Veganismus in manchen Punkten radikaler ist, als es der Utilitarismus verlangen würde, und in anderen Punkten weniger effektiv. So könnten Utilitaristinn*en und Veganer*innen sich zwar leicht auf die moralische Ablehnung des Essens von (massenproduziertem) Fleisch verständigen; die Ansichten könnten jedoch drastisch auseinander gehen, wenn es um andere Beispiele der grausamen Behandlung von Tieren geht, wie etwa besonders schmerzhaften medizinischen Experimenten. Darüber hinaus sind Utilitaristinn*en skeptischer, was den Unterschied betrifft, den eine einzelne Person durch ihr Verhalten machen kann (etwa bezüglich großer sozialer und ökonomischer Strukturen wie Fleischproduktion und –konsum) und sie könnten bereit sein, bestimmte Instanzen der Ausnutzung von Tieren im Lichte der spezifischen menschlichen Interessen, denen diese dienen, zu akzeptieren (denken könnte man hier etwa an die Nutzung von Tieren im Sport).

In ihrem Artikel *Transworld Egoism, Empathy, and the Golden Rule* führt Harriet Baber aus, dass das Nachdenken über unsere Gegenstücke in anderen möglichen Welten – die uns sehr ähnlich sind, aber uns nicht genau gleichen – eine egoistische Begründung für altruistische Grundsätze liefern könnte. Baber beginnt mit der Unterscheidung von engem und weitem Präferentismus – wobei der enge Präferentismus nur solche Interessen berücksichtigt, die ich tatsächlich habe, während der weite Präferentismus auch Interessen berücksichtigt, die ich leicht haben *könnte*, wenn man meine tatsächliche psychologische Struktur voraussetzt. Der weite Präferentismus erlaubt es uns, einen interessenbasierten Egoismus zu formulieren, in dem ich auch eine Motivation hätte, diejenigen meiner Gegenstücke zu begünstigen, die mir ähneln, aber nicht genau meine Interessen besitzen. Dies, so Baber, läuft auf eine egoistische Begründung der Goldenen Regel hinaus: Wenn ich eine Motivation habe, diese Gegenstücke wie mich selbst zu behandeln, dann habe ich auch eine Motivation, alle, die mir in relevanten Hinsichten ähneln, wie mich zu behandeln.

Augustin Fragnière setzt sich in seinem Beitrag *Ecological Limits and the Meaning of Freedom* mit dem vermeintlichen Konflikt auseinander, der entsteht, wo Individuen auf Nachhaltigkeitsziele verpflichtet werden und damit Einschnitte ihrer persönlichen Freiheit hinnehmen müssen. Es ist ein von Gegnern einer ökologisch und nachhaltig

eingestellten Politik häufig vorgebrachtes Argument, dass eine solche Politik zu sehr in individuelle Freiheitsrechte eingreife (und dass eine solche Politik besser durch Anreize verfolgt würde, als durch Gesetzgebung und Regulierung). Fragnière meint, dass ein solcher Konflikt nicht für jedes philosophische Freiheitskonzept auftrete – und er argumentiert, dass Philip Pettits Begriff von Freiheit als Abwesenheit von Dominanz tatsächlich mit streng ‚grüner' Politik kompatibel sei.

Wie ich bereits erwähnt habe, haben alle drei Artikel gemeinsam, dass sie etablierte ‚Wahrheiten' darüber in Frage stellen, welche moralischen Theorien bestimmte ethische Standpunkte stützen können (oder eben nicht). ‚Utilitarismus ist eine Theorie für Veganer*innen', ‚Egoistinn*en können sich nicht um andere kümmern', oder ‚Grünen liegt nichts an persönlichen Freiheitsrechten' – diese Gemeinplätze werden in diesem Band zur Diskussion gestellt. Im Lichte aktueller Entwicklungen innerhalb und außerhalb des universitären Betriebs ist vielleicht folgender Gedanke das einigende Motiv dieser Ausgabe: etablierte Wahrheiten niemals als gegeben hinzunehmen, da sie so leicht von denen zerstört werden, denen an Wahrheit nichts liegt.

Diejenigen, die glaubten, dass jemand wie Donald Trump niemals Präsident eines demokratischen Landes werden könnte, lagen falsch; genau wie jene, die meinten, Trump würde sein aggressives und verlogenes Verhalten ändern, wenn er erst das Amt übernommen hätte. Demokratien in aller Welt sind in Gefahr, und Europäer*innen werden sich bewusst, dass sich eine demokratische Struktur nicht einfach selber erhält. Die radikale Rechte in Mitteleuropa, geführt von Marine Le Pen und der Alternative für Deutschland, hält sich nicht an die etablierten Regeln des demokratischen Diskurses und Faktenchecks werden nicht genug sein, um sie zu stoppen.

An Universitäten werden Forschungsgelder immer knapper, Arbeitsverhältnisse immer unsicherer und Stipendien und Preise werden von Jahr zu Jahr umkämpfter – und viele Nachwuchswissenschaftler*innen erkennen, dass ihnen die Universität keine berufliche Zukunft bieten kann. Heutige Universitäten sind nicht länger geschützte Räume, die der Suche nach wissenschaftlichen oder moralischen Wahrheiten dienen. Mehr und mehr werden sie nach privatwirtschaftlichen Grundätzen betrieben und ihre Angestellten sind gezwungen, sich diesen neuen Gegebenheiten anzupassen.

Man könnte sich dazu verleiten lassen, der Hoffnungslosigkeit, die sich in der internationalen Politik und an den Universitäten ausbreitet, mit noch mehr Wettbewerb und Verteidigungsgebaren entgegenzutreten. Aber wenn wir den hier versammelten Beiträgen eine allgemeine Lehre abgewinnen wollten, so wäre diese eben nicht ‚weitermachen wie immer'. Alle drei Beiträge fordern uns auf, unkonventionell und an alten Trennlinien vorbei zu denken; und zwei der Beiträge argumentieren klar für ‚unerwartete Alliierte'.

Übertragen auf die Politik kann dies als Aufruf verstanden werden, nach allen zu suchen, die die liberale Demokratie verteidigen – jenseits von Parteigrenzen. Übertragen auf den Universitätsbetrieb kann dies als Aufruf zu echter Solidarität verstanden werden zwischen denen, die dort in unsicheren Verhältnissen arbeiten – Solidarität anstelle von (zu oft bedeutungsloser) ‚Kollaboration'.

Utilitarianism and Animal Cruelty: Further Doubts

Ben Davies

Utilitarianism has an apparent pedigree when it comes to animal welfare. It supports the view that animal welfare matters just as much as human welfare. And many utilitarians support and oppose various practices in line with more mainstream concern over animal welfare, such as that we should not kill animals for food or other uses, and that we ought not to torture animals for fun. This relationship has come under tension from many directions. The aim of this article is to add further considerations in support of that tension. I suggest three ways in which utilitarianism comes significantly apart from mainstream concerns with animal welfare. First, utilitarianism opposes animal cruelty only when it offers an inefficient ratio of pleasure to pain; while this may be true of eating animal products, it is not obviously true of other abuses. Second, utilitarianism faces a familiar problem of the inefficacy of individual decisions; I consider a common response to this worry, and offer further concerns. Finally, the common utilitarian argument against animal cruelty ignores various pleasures that humans may get from the superior status that a structure supporting exploitation confers.

Introduction

There are various connections between utilitarianism[1] and certain practices aimed at promoting the welfare of animals. Utilitarianism supports the view that non-human animal suffering is morally just as important as human suffering.[2] And many utilitarians

[1] In what follows, unless otherwise specified 'utilitarianism' will mean hedonistic act utilitarianism, where what one morally ought to do is either whatever will bring about the greatest available balance of pleasure over pain, or whatever one could reasonably expect to bring this about.

[2] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1789] 1907), at C17, n122; John Stuart Mill, 'Whewell on Moral Philosophy', in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, edited by John M. Robson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1852] 1963-1991), Volume X, pp. 185-187; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (London: MacMillan, [1874] 1907), Book IV, Chapter I; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd Edition (London: Cape, [1975] 1990); Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1979] 2011).

support particular moral commitments that line up with the commitments of advocates of animal rights and animal welfare who are not philosophers, the most obvious example being that we should not kill or exploit non-human animals for food, or exploit them in other ways for our pleasure.[3] I will call the stance that we ought not, for utilitarian reasons, engage in these acts 'vegan-utilitarianism'.

We can contrast vegan-utilitarianism with veganism as it is typically practiced by non-philosophers. Of course, people practice veganism for a variety of reasons, and to differing degrees. But we may take the stance of the Vegan Society as at least one central kind of veganism. The Society quotes its 1979 Articles of Association as saying that veganism is 'a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose'. Call this, for want of a better word, 'everyday veganism'.

This paper explores vegan-utilitarianism in some detail, and offers three reasons to think that it overlaps rather less with the concerns of everyday vegans than may initially appear to be the case. My conclusion is that supporters of animal welfare should not regard utilitarianism as a more plausible moral theory because it offers intuitively 'correct' answers on this issue. It is important to distinguish this from the outset from two alternative claims. First, I am not claiming that, until now, there have been no objections raised against a utilitarian approach from an animal welfare perspective; clearly, there have been criticisms from feminist care ethics[4] and from rights-based perspectives.[5] Other authors have suggested that a properly utilitarian approach might advocate practices that many supporters of animal welfare would condemn. As McMahan[6] suggests, the aim of minimising non-human suffering seems to imply that, in the right circumstances, we ought to 'arrange the gradual extinction of carnivorous species, replacing them with new herbivorous ones', since a significant amount of animal suffering is caused by other animals in the wild; although as McMahan acknowledges, our current state of understanding renders this move unwise in the extreme. This argument is also made by Singer.[7] Davis questions whether a strict refusal to eat animal products, or even animals themselves, is the best way to reduce overall suffering.[8] In this sense, this paper can be

[3] E.g., Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Alastair Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs and People', *Philosophical Perspectives* 18:1 (2004), pp. 229-245; Gaverick Matheney, 'Expected Utility, Contributory Causation, and Vegetarianism', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19:3 (2002), pp. 293-297; Gaverick Matheney, 'Least Harm: A Defense of Vegetarianism from Steven Davis's Omnivorous Proposal', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 16:5 (2003), pp. 505-511; Gaverick Matheney, 'Utilitarianism and Animals', in *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*, edited by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 13-26.

[4] E.g. Josephine Donovan, 'Animal Rights and Feminist Theory', *Signs* 15:2 (1990), pp. 350-375.

[5] E.g. Tom Regan, 'Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9:4 (1980), pp. 305-324; Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd Edition (California: University of California Press, [1983] 2004), pp. 195-231; Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[6] Jeff McMahan, 'The Meat Eaters', *The New York Times* (September 19th, 2010). Online at: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/the-meat-eaters (accessed 2016-05-25).

[7] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 227

[8] Steven Davis, 'The Least Harm Principle may Require that Humans Consume a Diet Containing Large Herbivores, Not a Vegan Diet', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 16:4 (2003), pp. 387-394. Gaverick Matheney offers a response in 'Least Harm: A Defense of Vegetarianism from

seen as offering further reasons to suspect that the connection between utilitarianism and everyday veganism is more fragile than it seems. It will not shock anyone with any knowledge of moral philosophy to hear that utilitarianism will sometimes advocate actions that different moral views – such as rights-based views – will condemn. My aim is not to reveal something surprising about utilitarianism itself, but to explore some under-discussed implications of utilitarian commitments to suggest that, at a practical level, there is rather less agreement between vegan-utilitarians and other vegans than has typically been supposed.

Second, I am not going to argue that utilitarianism has no scope for condemning abuses of animals; even given the objections I will raise, I think that utilitarians should clearly condemn many current practices in industrial farming, for instance.

For the purposes of this paper, I take veganism in a broad sense, as the abstention both from food products produced by animals, including the animals themselves, and from other ways of using animals primarily for our own gain, to their cost; this includes using animals as a form of entertainment. Of course, it may be that some animal products do not require causing animals pain, or killing economically useless male offspring;[9] but I will ignore such cases. Readers should assume that I am discussing only cases where the use of animals involves causing harm, including death. Some reasons for doing this seem to fit fairly well with a utilitarian outlook, where practices cause animals physical and emotional suffering, and deprive them of pleasures they would otherwise have had. Other reasons, such as a concern with exploitation in and of itself, or a focus on rights violations, fit less obviously. But it does seem to be the case that many vegans are motivated largely by the idea of reducing suffering, and almost all are motivated by it to some degree. Moreover, even if it is for different reasons, it seems as though vegan-utilitarians and their everyday counterparts will end up advocating similar actions and abstentions in a great many cases. As I will argue, however, the overlap between these two stances is rather slimmer than it might first appear.

Vegan-utilitarians do not always offer exclusively utilitarian arguments; Singer,[10] for instance, appeals to the idea of 'marginal cases', such as humans who lack the complex cognitive capacities that are usually taken to distinguish humans from other animals. But it seems clear that as utilitarians their position is ultimately motivated by utilitarianism, and that they think utilitarian arguments should carry the day even if they are prepared to appeal to other kinds of arguments as an ecumenical exercise. Regan quotes Singer as saying that

Steven Davis's Omnivorous Proposal', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 16:5 (2003), pp. 505-511.

[9] E.g., see Heather Saul, 'Hatched, Discarded and Gassed: What Happens to Male Chicks in the UK', *The Independent* (March 5th, 2015). Online at: http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/hatched-discarded-gassed-what-happens-to-male-chicks-in-the-uk-10088509.html (accessed 2016-05-25).

[10] Singer, *Practical Ethics,* p. 66. Given my explicit definition of utilitarianism in note 1 as 'hedonistic act utilitarianism', it is worth acknowledging that Singer's view in *Practical Ethics* is in fact a form of preference utilitarianism. However, Singer has more recently abandoned the preference view for its hedonistic counterpart; e.g., see Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 240-283.

> I think that the only right I ever attribute to animals is the 'right' to equal consideration of interests, and anything that is expressed by talking of such a right could equally well be expressed by the assertion that animals' interests ought to be given equal consideration with the like interests of humans[,][11]

which he takes to be a utilitarian perspective.

The next three sections respectively consider three tensions between utilitarian and everyday veganism. One of these tensions has been well explored, although I aim to offer some novel considerations; the other two, so far as I am aware, have not.

First, I suggest that a focus on the eating of animals may mislead us about the level of agreement between utilitarians and other animal welfare stances. This is because utilitarianism opposes these practices for the only reason it can oppose any practice: because they lead to an inefficient trade off of pleasure and pain. When confronted with more efficient practices, utilitarianism offers us no reason to oppose them.

Second, it is a familiar problem for vegan-utilitarianism that although it sees the suffering caused by producing meat as outweighing the pleasure gained from meat-eating, it must confront what we may call the efficacy problem: in a large capitalist economy, one person's eating habits make no difference to the production of meat. Alastair Norcross offers a probabilistic response to this problem,[12] and I suggest some problems with it. I then consider the more plausible response that utilitarians should instead endorse much more active responses than a mere refusal to eat meat.

This, however, points to the third problem. I adapt an argument from ~~Coleman~~, who criticises the assumption that utilitarianism obviously opposes racialized slavery, to suggest that there may be other forms of pain and pleasure involved in the use of animal products, and that the balance of pain and pleasure does not obviously come out in favour of veganism, or indeed of any particularly radical stance on animal rights.[13] I should note from the outset that my analogy stretches only so far as the form of ~~Coleman~~'s argument; I do not attempt to make any analogy between the conditions suffered by slaves in the particular historical instances that ~~Coleman~~ discusses, and the condition of animals that are exploited by humans.

The Efficiency Problem

A central utilitarian argument against using animal products is that the suffering and death of individual animals clearly outweighs the pleasure achieved by those who eat or

[11] Peter Singer, The Fable of the Fox and the Unliberated Animals. *Ethics* 88: 2 (1978), pp. 119-125, at p. 122; quoted in Tom Regan, 'Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism and Animal Rights', p. 307.

[12] Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs and People'.

[13] Nathaniel Adam Tobias ~~Coleman~~, 'What is wrong with [R.M. Hare's argument against] slavery', available at https://www.academia.edu/2761414/What_is_wrong_with_R._M._Hares_arguments_against_slavery (Unpublished). ~~Coleman~~ intentionally crosses out his name due to its historical connections with the slavery of his ancestors. See Gender and Philosophy: The Blog, How Philosophy Was "Whitewashed", interview with Dr Nathaniel ~~Coleman~~ (August 24th 2015). Available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/press/2014-15/philosophy-whitewash (available 2016-10-24).

use the products. At least for citizens of wealthy countries, who can get nourishment without the use of animal products, this seems largely true. What is particularly compelling about this argument from a utilitarian perspective is that an individual animal can produce only so much meat, for instance, and that meat can only produce a limited amount of pleasure amongst those who eat it, because once it is gone it is gone. As Singer puts it:

> In considering the ethics of the use of animal flesh for human food in industrialized societies, we are considering a situation in which a relatively minor human interest must be balanced against the lives and welfare of the animals involved[14]

But the fact that the pleasure one gains from eating meat is a 'minor interest' is not itself a utilitarian argument. This is for two reasons. First, Regan points out that there may be many other interests involved in meat-eating, such as people's livelihoods, that are less clearly characterised as minor compared with the pleasures involved in eating meat;[15] I address this idea in more detail in the fourth section. But it is also worth noting that the claim that the interests involved in meat-eating are minor only supports the utilitarian argument that we should avoid eating meat if we add the further premise that the lives and welfare of each animal must be balanced against very few instances of this minor interest.

When it comes to meat eating, and most other consumed animal products, this premise is likely to be true. Food can only feed so many people, or the same person so many times, and it goes off if it is not used. But utilitarians are not welcome to help themselves to that latter premise in all instances of animal killing or ill-treatment. Consider a different, but also common, use of animals that requires killing them: leather. Leather, if well treated, lasts considerably longer than food. A pair of leather shoes might provide a significant amount of pleasure to a single person if he wears them every day. Once he is done with them, that needn't be the end of the pleasure; he might pass them onto a relative or friend, or simply donate them to charity, providing someone else with the opportunity to get some use out of them. And when they are no longer any good as shoes, the leather itself can be recycled for a variety of other uses. I do not know whether all these multiple uses would outweigh the suffering caused to the animal that was killed for its skin. But it at least seems far less obvious than the equivalent question about that animal's meat.

It might be possible, given certain science fictional technologies, to sever the connection between animal suffering and pleasure inefficiency even in the case of eating animal products. We might imagine a machine of the kind dreamt up by Philip K. Dick, where 'empathy-boxes' link the experiences of one individual to many others:[16] if the pleasure one person experiences from eating an animal could be simultaneously felt by many others, a great deal more pleasure would be produced for the same amount of pain. But the case is perhaps more persuasively felt by sticking to realistic examples, such as the leather shoes.

[14] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 54.

[15] Regan, 'Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism and Animal Rights', pp. 310-312.

[16] Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Orion Books: London, [1968] 1999).

Of course, a utilitarian will reasonably object at this point that the relevant question is not simply whether the use of leather produces more pleasure than pain, but whether it produces a better balance *than the alternatives*. And nowadays, there are plenty of vegan alternatives to leather shoes, including ones that are sufficiently smart to pass muster in the most formal environments. Given such alternatives, there is no excuse to buy leather. One potential issue with this response, is the assumption that alternative products provide all the pleasures of leather shoes. As I suggest in the fourth section, there may be certain psychological benefits from using animal products that cannot be replicated by vegan products because it is the fact that it is an animal product that causes the pleasure. Nonetheless, this response clearly reduces the likelihood that using leather will come out as the best option overall under a utilitarian framework.

There are, however, more difficult cases. Most everyday vegans are opposed to forms of entertainment that involve cruelty to animals, such as horse racing, bullfighting and the use of animals in circuses. But it should be clear that whereas a single animal can only serve as food for a small number of people (science fiction cases notwithstanding), a single animal involved in a bull fight, for instance, can entertain a much larger group. Unlike the pleasures involved in eating, the pleasure of entertainment is in principle what McAfee and Brynjolfsson refer to as 'non-rival': its enjoyment by one person does not necessarily impede its equal enjoyment by others.[17] Until relatively recently, such entertainments might have been non-rival in principle but not in practice, since practices such as bull fighting require venues, which have limited capacities. But we have for some while had the capacity to offer access to all forms of entertainment to many people at once via communications technologies. In principle, entertainments involving cruelty to animals could entertain millions or even billions. If the spectacle involves only a few animals, it becomes increasingly unlikely that the level of pain caused will outweigh the total, non-rival pleasure spread across all spectators.

What about the possibility that there are direct substitutes that clearly provide a better balance of pleasure and pain, as seems to be the case for food and, perhaps, leather? We might suggest that someone who wants to go to watch the bull fight should instead watch a football game, or go to the ballet; both of these are entertaining, and neither requires animal cruelty. But this is simply not how entertainment works. Certainly, someone who finds the ballet just as entertaining as the bull fight may do better in a moral sense not to watch the fight. But why should we think that fans of bull fighting *will* find other activities just as entertaining? It might be the kind and intensity of pleasure available from watching a bullfight is available only *from* a bull fight, at least for many spectators.

One response to this is that alternative forms of entertainment do not need to be as entertaining as a bull fight to triumph in a utilitarian calculus, since their lack of involvement with animal cruelty means that they are at a significant advantage in the balance of pleasure over pain. What we should each do as ethical consumers is to find another source of entertainment that, while less entertaining than bull fighting, provides the best overall balance of pleasure and pain.

However, as the third section notes, whether or not I watch the fight is only loosely connected to the issue of whether it occurs; from that perspective, my individual

[17] Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, *The Second Machine Age* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

decision seems mostly relevant to the level of pleasure that *I* receive. And insofar as utilitarianism is bound to consider all pleasures equally, if I really would get less pleasure from watching football than bull fighting, then I might be morally *obligated* to watch the fight if I can make no difference to the suffering of the bull.[18] The non-rival nature of mass entertainment is relevant for the utilitarian not only as passive, isolated consumers, but as potential active opponents, of various practices. When we are deciding, under a utilitarian theory, whether to try to prevent a practice, whether as protestors or as law makers, organisers and television executives, we face the following choices: allow or ban the practice; promote or reject it; protest it, let it happen, or support it. Even if one is doubtful of the efficacy of an individual's decision to stop personally watching the fight, the question of how the practice's end would affect the mass of people is relevant to these questions. If bull fighting is sufficiently popular, it seems irrelevant for a utilitarian from this perspective that there are *other* forms of entertainment that people can enjoy. The relevant question is whether more pleasure is caused by banning or permitting the practice; by promoting or rejecting it. If sufficient numbers of people get enjoyment, however trivial, from bull fighting, and would on average get less pleasure from other forms of entertainment if it were banned, or simply not promoted, then the utilitarian seems bound to say that it should be permitted and promoted. Even if the pain of the animal outweighs the difference in pleasure for *one* dissatisfied fan (or would do so, if that fan's refusal to watch could make any difference) – the total balance will be very different for a mass audience because the amount of pain caused to the animal need not change even as the amount of pleasure sacrificed grows significantly. The aggregate of even quite small differences in pleasure between a large group who watch a bull fight, and the same group watching the football, adds up. This is unlike the animal food industry: to please more people with animal food products, more animals have to suffer. So the relationship between the level of animal suffering, and the level of human pleasure, remains somewhat constant. In the case of televised sport, that relationship is entirely untethered.

The focus of the utilitarian view is not on the 'trivial' nature of the pleasures involved in exploiting animals, but on the relative inefficiency to which this triviality contributes. So those who are opposed to granting trivial pleasures any contest with animal lives and fundamental welfare will find themselves in tension with the utilitarian when this link is broken, as it is in cases of mass-televised animal cruelty that also provides mass entertainment. Televised animal cruelty is a potentially very efficient deliverer of pleasure, and so seems to be condoned by utilitarian argument.

An anonymous reviewer notes that this argument ignores the significant distress caused by televised bull-fighting to those who oppose it. This would certainly need to go into a utilitarian calculus. Nonetheless, it does not seem to me to change the overall force of the argument, the central point of which is that the relationship between animal suffering and human pleasure that licenses the utilitarian-vegan conclusion when it comes to meat eating does not exist in the use of animals for entertainment.[19]

[18] See also Hud Hudson, 'Collective responsibility and moral vegetarianism', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24:2 (1993), pp. 89-104, at p. 94.

[19] I would add that although it is an empirical question, it also seems unlikely to me that the effect on distress will be comparable with the effect on pleasure. Many people who would feel distress at animal cruelty would simply avoid watching it or thinking about it. Merely having the opportunity

The Efficacy Problem

I suggested in the previous section that although the non-rival nature of televised entertainment makes no difference to the utilitarian morality of bull fighting for the individual, it also seems to be the case that, in the context of televised bull fighting, a fan's decision not to watch it makes only a negative difference to the overall balance of pain and pleasure. This is because the fan will be unhappy (or at least less happy than if he were watching) while the pain of the bull is not eliminated, or even reduced. A similar concern applies to other forms of animal exploitation. My decision not to buy meat saves no animals, because the companies from which I buy my food do not base their policies on any individual's consumer habits.

One potential response to this is a probabilistic one. Even if it is true that no individual decision will change anything, there is a small chance that *my* decision could be the one that changes a group that is just too small for the industry to notice into one that is just big enough for them to notice.[20] As Norcross puts it, suppose that:

> For each group of 10,000 who give up chicken, a quarter of a million fewer chickens are bred per year […] if you give up eating chicken, you have only a one in ten thousand chance of making any difference to the lives of chickens, unless it is certain that fewer than 10,000 people will ever give up eating chicken, in which case you have no chance […] While the chance that your behavior is harmful may be small, the harm that is risked is enormous […] A one in ten thousand chance of saving 250,000 chickens per year from excruciating lives is morally and mathematically equivalent to the certainty of saving 25 chickens per year. We commonly accept that even small risks of great harms are unacceptable.[21]

Such a response agrees that one's chance of making a difference is small. But it responds by also denying that the difference one *would* make if one made any difference is merely one's own meat consumption; for the circumstances under which one would make a difference are those in which one tips a balance that contains the decisions of thousands of other people. Given such an assumption, the expected benefit of my giving up meat (that is, the size of benefit multiplied by the likelihood of success) is around the same as if I had personally prevented the deaths of one person's meat consumption.

I will assume for the sake of argument that this is a correct, or near enough correct, description of the meat industry.[22] It is worth noting, along with Nobis that at least the strand of argument quoted above is not obviously available to utilitarians who base their moral assessment on *actual* outcomes.[23] After all, even if I cannot know whether the chicken I am eating is the 'threshold' chicken, my act is only wrong if it actually *is* the threshold. It is not wrong to take risks, for an actual-outcome utilitarian

to be distressed is not necessarily distressing. Those who would enjoy the spectacle, on the other hand, are more likely to actually be affected by its availability because they are more likely to actually watch.

[20] E.g. Singer, 'Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism'; Matheney, 'Expected Utility, Contributory Causation, and Vegetarianism'.

[21] Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs and People', p. 233.

[22] For some dissent on the issue of thresholds, see Raymond Frey, *Rights, Killing and Suffering: Moral Vegetarianism and Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 214.

[23] Nathan Nobis, 'Vegetarianism and Virtue: Does Consequentialism Demand too Little?', *Social Theory and Practice* 28:1 (2002), pp. 135-156, at pp. 142-143, n20.

(aside from possible distress one might cause to others or oneself in doing so); I would merely be taking a risk of doing something wrong. So this argument seems to rely on a form of utilitarianism that says that one ought to do what one reasonably *expects* to have the best outcomes. Norcross offers an additional thought, however, that may be available to actualist utilitarians: even if I do not in fact tip any particular balance, my decision will reduce the amount of time before that balance is tipped by someone else.[24] It seems questionable whether *this* outcome outweighs the pleasure gained from eating chicken. But I will assume for the sake of argument that we are considering the more secure appeal to expected benefit.

There is a further problem with this argument, not raised by its other critics. As quoted above, Norcross seems to suggest that the probabilistic utilitarian view falls in line with common sense, since 'We commonly accept that even small risks of great harms are unacceptable.' If commonly is taken to mean 'often', then this is certainly true, and Norcross provides several examples of objectionable negligence where the risk is unlikely, but severe: failing to secure a child in their car seat; drinking heavily during pregnancy; corporate negligence in airline safety. But as well as all being cases of unlikely but potentially high-cost risks, these examples all have other things in common with the case of the meat industry; and cases that lack these features while maintaining the feature of the small risk of a great harm are *not* so commonly viewed as unacceptable. Finally, these features are not ones that a utilitarian view can make direct use of. So it is misleading to imply that utilitarianism falls in line with 'common' acceptance.

The first feature is that all of these risks are not consented to; indeed, aside from the final example they are not such that their potential victims *can* consent: children, animals and the unborn cannot give consent for harms in any meaningful way. The second is that, at least as Norcross presents them, they are examples where the intended risks and benefits are distributed across different people, and where the intended benefits are accrued by those who take the risky decision, but who do not suffer the risk. In a typical case where an airline fails to spend money on standard safety measures, for instance, the passengers are unlikely to be consulted, and hence cannot give their consent, and are also unlikely to be the intended beneficiaries of such corner cutting. Someone who drinks heavily during pregnancy imposes risks on her child, but the benefits of drinking are enjoyed only by her. Both of these features apply to the animal industry: animals cannot give their consent to being killed for our pleasure, and presumably would not, if they could. And even if animals do incur some benefits while being reared for meat or other products (e.g. veterinary care), the aims of the industry are entirely focused on benefits for producers and consumers.

One might think that the 'Replaceability Argument' speaks against this latter claim.[25] This argument says that from a utilitarian perspective, it would be permissible to rear and kill animals so long as they had lives that were worth living, had no or only weak future preferences that killing them would thwart, and were replaced by equally happy, or happier, animals that would not have been brought into existence under a different system. This would be better than a vegan world because such a world would never bring the vast majority of animals into existence, depriving them of happy lives. But whatever the pragmatic plausibility of such a view, even if it would be better for the

[24] Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs and People', p. 233.

[25] E.g. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 121.

animal to live and die than not to live at all, this does not show that a creature that actually lived under such a system would rationally consent to die in order to perpetuate it. And it does not show that such a system has benefits to the animal as an aim when it rears them.

Unlike the problem of efficiency, this argument does not tell utilitarians to support animal cruelty in certain cases. Rather, the issue is that the argument makes no distinction between the kind of probabilistic risk to others that one takes when one buys meat, and other kinds of risk that are far less obviously immoral. In other words, the issue is that this argument, if taken at face value, condemns too much. Imagine that Norcross' airline could take out oxygen masks, life jackets and emergency exits as he imagines, but that it informs potential passengers of its decision, and passes (some of) the savings onto them in the form of cheaper flights. Similarly, lowering the speed limit for drivers in Formula 1 races might have a significant impact on the risk of fatality; but drivers might consent to the risks of higher limits on the grounds that it would compromise the sport.

If drivers consent to driving at current speeds, or airline passengers willingly consent to additional safety risks, Norcross' argument seems to suggest that this is just as wrong, and just as obviously wrong, as it is for a parent to fail to strap in their child in a short car journey, or for any of us to purchase animal products. One cannot support the probabilistic argument as being in line with common sense morality, as Norcross does, simply by pointing to some cases where unlikely but serious risks are not tolerated. This is because there are other similarities between these cases; and, crucially, these similarities make use of concepts to which utilitarians cannot directly help themselves in moral argument. I do not claim that it is obvious that we should permit voluntary deregulation of airline safety, or oppose a speed limit in Formula 1; rather, the morality of those decisions, even given equivalent numbers, is not the same as the question of whether we should risk being the person who could, but did not, make a difference of 10,000 chicken deaths to the yearly toll of the meat industry. In the former cases there is the potential for consent; in the latter there is not.[26] This is further supported by the thought that a meat industry that did give animals a life worth living, and to which the likely alternative was that those animals would never exist, should find support among utilitarians. But most everyday vegans would not support it even on those terms.

This is not to say that utilitarians have no further response. Indeed, they do have a persuasive response, and one to which Norcross briefly alludes. The problem, as I will argue in the fourth section, is that the radical nature of this response contributes to a further problem with the utilitarian view. The argument I have in mind is hinted at, briefly, by Norcross when he says, 'Furthermore, many people who become vegetarians influence others to become vegetarian, who in turn influence others, and so on'.[27] One's options when it comes to animal products are not simply to eat or abstain. There are a great many activists who not only refuse to eat animal products themselves, but put a great deal of money and effort into persuading others to follow them. Whatever they say about the expected benefit of giving up animal products, utilitarians should support

[26] See also Sven Ove Hansson, 'Risk and Ethics: Three Approaches', in *Risk: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Tim Lewens (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 21-35.

[27] Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs and People', p. 233.

active as well as passive responses to the animal industry:[28] certainly persuasion, certainly political organisation, and perhaps even criminal sabotage of the meat industry, such as rescue of animals marked for slaughter, although this will depend on how various actions affect animals currently trapped inside the industry, and how well these animals can be cared for. I will now explain why such a position, compelling as it is, runs into some problems as a utilitarian response.

The Other Pleasures Problem

I have suggested that one utilitarian response to the efficacy problem – whatever one's stance on the expected benefit issue – is to admit that we are morally obligated to do more than passively refrain from certain practices; at the least, we ought to persuade others to do so as well. What this means, however, is that a utilitarian cannot simply factor in their own feelings when comparing them against the suffering of animals; the utilitarian response to animal suffering must be public and active, not private and passive. And this may lead to a further wrong-making feature of the superficially obvious utilitarian support of veganism. My focus in this section is on kinds of pleasure other than those of taste that eating animal products gives to many people. My argument bears significant debt to an argument outlined by ~~Coleman~~ about the permissibility of slavery under utilitarianism. To reiterate: I do not intend for there to be any analogy between the case of racialized slavery that ~~Coleman~~ discusses, and the case of animal slaughter, other than the broad form of the argument. I will briefly outline ~~Coleman's~~ case, before explaining how I think it transfers to the case of non-human animals.

~~Coleman~~ considers, among various arguments for the wrongness of slavery, the apparently common assumption that utilitarianism will clearly oppose slavery on the grounds that the pains suffered by slaves will obviously outweigh any gains to slaveholders. ~~Coleman~~ responds that in the specific case of racialized slavery – that is, black slaves held captive by whites, such as occurred in antebellum America – this ignores the aggregate effects of three further benefits: 'Schadenfreude, security and status'.[29] Schadenfreude, because some white slavers actively enjoyed causing misery to their slaves; security, because the control of considerable labour power brought a sense of security to slavers; and status, because racialized slavery created superior social categories, including the category of 'white', which benefitted even those who were not slavers. These categories also apply, to differing degrees, to the utilitarian support of veganism.

Consider once more Singer's claim that the pleasures involved in meat-eating are trivial compared with the suffering of animals. As we have already seen, Regan raises a significant problem with this view: even if the pleasures directly associated with eating meat are easily outweighed, the meat *industry* supports a great many employees, and their families. This may be classed as a pleasure of security; the existence of a successful meat industry provides at least some of its economic agents with financial stability, and

[28] Indeed, Frey, in *Rights, Killing and Suffering*, argues throughout that the correct response is to actively protest factory farming while continuing to eat meat, on the grounds that the former can make a difference, and the latter cannot

[29] ~~Coleman~~, What is wrong with [R.M. Hare's argument against] slavery', pp. 6-7

hence a feeling of security. While a single person's decision to abstain from meat will not bring the entire industry crashing down, we can reorient Norcross' probabilistic argument to this issue. Firms' hiring practices are related to their profits; if every person who becomes vegan brings us closer to a tipping point where fewer animals are bred, then they must also bring companies who make those reductions closer to the point where they reduce the number of employees they have. Perhaps those employees will get other jobs, but perhaps they will not; even if they will, threats to the animal industry will increase the *feeling* of insecurity among the industry's workforce.

Turning briefly to Schadenfreude, there are surely some people in charge of animals who get pleasure from mistreating them. While this is unlikely to be motivated by hatred – as may have been the case in the examples ~~Coleman~~ cites – a utilitarian cannot simply discount these pleasures. Although it is perhaps reasonable to assume that these will not outweigh the displeasure experienced by the mistreated animals by themselves, they still contribute to the overall hedonistic benefit of the industry; and it would be significantly harder, though by no means impossible, for a sadist who has found their niche in the industry to get those pleasures without such an outlet.

Finally, there is the issue of status. Just as racialized slavery can benefit those whites who did not hold slaves by placing them in one or more socially superior classes, the animal industry may psychologically benefit many humans by placing them into a category – enabled only by its contrast with non-human animals – of creatures that *cannot* legitimately be treated the way we treat animals. This status may benefit those who oppose animal exploitation, and even those who are theoretically opposed to the idea of human superiority. Our language is filled with examples of derogatory comparisons to animals, including examples where cruel treatment of animals is justified in the act of denouncing such treatment when applied to humans: 'This company is a disgrace; they crowded us onto the train like cattle'; 'I treat my dog better than that'; and so on.

A vocal opposition to animal exploitation that made use of the idea that animals are our moral equals challenges our superiority, and unsettles reliably reassuring categories into which we place ourselves. Such arguments will, and already do, cause significant anger and distress. Many supporters of animal rights experience upset and anger from others simply for explaining their views on animal equality, even when those views are actively sought out; if, as the previous section suggested, utilitarian arguments imply that a passive refusal to eat animal products is not enough, *active* protest against the animal product industry seems likely to cause even more upset and anger, even if it is also a more effective way of convincing some people than passive refusal alone. In addition, it is important to note, in contrast with many expressions of human equality, that animals cannot benefit psychologically from the mere fact that others are fighting their corner, and expressing their right to equal treatment.

This is not the only way that animal cruelty confers status. I briefly mentioned in the second section the idea that animal products may not be automatically replaceable in the way one might assume, because the fact that something is an animal product is itself relevant to the pleasure. In at least some such cases, this is a question of status. The fact that one's shoe, or bag, or jacket is made of real leather affords you a level of status that wearing a fake will not. The fact that one is hunting a real fox, rather than simply riding around with hounds and horses, may be integral for some hunters to the enjoyment of the practice. Thus, the exploitation of animals provides ample opportunities for people to experience the pleasures of status, and of 'quality'.

Utilitarians, among others, may regard these reactions as irrational or selfish. But, at least according to the classical utilitarianism of Mill, Bentham and Singer, pleasures and pains are to be counted according to their intrinsic value or disvalue; the fact that they are irrational or selfish is not a reason in itself to discount them from our calculation.[30] The sheer scale of animal suffering in the current industry may make it seem fairly unlikely that, even given these additional considerations, human pleasure will outweigh that suffering. I am not sure it is such an easy matter to estimate; but it remains the case that a more refined version of animal exploitation might pass such a test. So long as animals are widely regarded as *eligible* for exploitation and cruel treatment in a way that humans are not, the psychological benefits of animal oppression have scope to continue. This seems to me to be another area in which a majority of animal welfare supporters ought to part from utilitarianism.

Conclusion

I have considered three ways that utilitarian theory seems to lead us away from various practices that are typical among supporters of animal rights and welfare. First, utilitarianism opposes animal exploitation, when it does, for the only reason that it opposes anything: because it is a comparatively inefficient way of getting pleasure over pain. But there are many examples of animal cruelty to which this apparent inefficiency does not obviously apply. Second, utilitarians face the problem that our individual actions seem to make little or no difference to animal suffering, and a standard utilitarian answer to this seems to rely on moral difference-making features of decision-making such as consent to which utilitarian theory is not welcome. An alternative utilitarian response – that we ought to do more than merely abstaining – is more persuasive. But it exacerbates a third problem with the connection between utilitarianism and everyday veganism, which is that the benefits many humans get from the use of animals extend beyond the immediate pleasure of that usage.

None of this is likely to persuade a committed utilitarian to give up their theory, since committed utilitarians are not typically persuaded to give up their comprehensive theory by first-order moral claims. What I hope to have done in this essay is raise further doubts, beyond those already raised by others, about the obviousness of the connection between utilitarianism and ending animal exploitation. For those who reason morally from the 'bottom up', a commitment to animal welfare should not lend utilitarianism much support as a normative theory; from the perspective of everyday vegans, utilitarianism gets plenty wrong. This is not to diminish the extent to which utilitarian writers have pushed boundaries when it comes to animal welfare; none of what I have said denies that utilitarian arguments comprehensively denounce our current practices, and raise animals to a level of moral concern in an admirably straightforward way. But it

[30] Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties and Plausibility of Hedonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), at pp. 117-123; 192-197 outlines various adjustments to simple hedonism that weight the value of pleasures and pains according to factors such as how much their recipients deserve them, or how appropriate the relevant attitude is. A utilitarianism that made use of this kind of view might be able to discount the moral worth of selfish or irrational pleasures, though this is still no guarantee that the balance would come out against some form of animal exploitation.

is also true, and worth remembering, that many of the persuasive arguments that utilitarians like Singer, Bentham and Norcross offer do not require a commitment to utilitarianism to be persuasive. Insofar as one is persuaded by these arguments, one ought not be a utilitarian.

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Transworld Egoism, Empathy, and the Golden Rule

Harriet E. Baber

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.[1] 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

[1] 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.[2]

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

[2] 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.[3] 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?'[4] 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

[3] 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.

[4] 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.[5] 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'.[6]

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

[5] 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.

[6] 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.[7] 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.

[7] 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.[8] 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.[9] 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.

[8] '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.

[9] 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.[10] 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

[10] 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.[11]

[11] 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 (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.'[12] 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 words.

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

[12] 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.'[13]

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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[13] From John Donne's 'Meditation XVII', in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*.

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Ecological Limits and the Meaning of Freedom: A Defense of Liberty as Non-Domination

Augustin Fragnière

It is now widely acknowledged that global environmental problems raise pressing social and political issues, but relatively little philosophical attention has been paid to their bearing on the concept of liberty. This must surprise us, because the question of whether environmental policies are at odds with individual liberty is bound to be controversial in the political arena. First, this article explains why a thorough philosophical debate about the relation between liberty and environmental constraints is needed. Second, based on Philip Pettit's typology of liberty, it assesses how different conceptions of liberty fare in a context of stringent ecological limits. Indeed, a simple conceptual analysis shows that some conceptions of liberty are more compatible than others with such limits, and with the policies necessary to avoid overshooting them. The article concludes that Pettit's conception of liberty as non-domination is more compatible with the existence of stringent ecological limits than the two alternatives considered.

Introduction

Normative debates over liberty have been going on for centuries, if not for longer, and they constitute an important subfield of social and political philosophy.[1] However, conceptions of liberty have rarely been assessed against the backdrop of global environmental issues. This article investigates the way assumptions about the finiteness of the ecological context in which human societies are embedded might influence our appraisal of different conceptions of freedom. It starts from the increasingly popular view that there are ecological limits that should not be transgressed by any means, if humanity is to avoid major harmful consequences. Furthermore, it assumes that keeping humanity's global impact within the boundaries of such a 'safe operating space'[2] with a reasonable chance of success, entails the necessity to reduce significantly the material and

[1] Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, and Hillel Steiner (Eds.), *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

[2] Johan Rockström *et al*., 'A Safe Operating Space for Humanity', *Nature* 461:7263 (2009a), pp. 472–475.

energy consumption of wealthy nations. In this article, I take these empirical facts for granted and focus on the consequences of respecting such limits in terms of liberty.

A thorough philosophical debate about the relation between liberty and environmental constraints is needed for various reasons. First, philosophers interested in environmental issues have written extensively about a wide array of topics, ranging from distributive justice in environmental goods to the value of the non-human world to our obligations toward future generations. Comparatively, the question of individual liberty as such has so far attracted surprisingly little attention.[3] Second, the concept of liberty has been a core component of major political debates for a long time,[4] and I take it that its role in debates about environmental policy is likely to grow in importance as these problems become more pressing. This is made clear by the fact that from the early days of environmentalism, some ideological groups have been quick to oppose environmental regulations in the name of liberty.[5] Third, and relatedly, there is currently a widespread intuition in the public that respecting stringent ecological limits is at odds with individual freedom. I suggest that this intuition is backed by two particular views. The first one holds that unless one assumes a technological breakthrough in the coming decades, a transition to sustainability would mean fewer goods and services available to individuals, which translates into less liberty for everyone (call this the *liberty vs scarcity* view). The second one builds on the idea that liberty functions as a check on the state's power to constrain individual actions. It holds that there are certain kinds of coercive policies that governments are not legitimately allowed to impose on their citizens, and that strict environmental regulations are precisely of that kind (call this the *liberty vs state* view). As a result of either of these views, it might indeed seem that states face a dilemma between protecting individual freedom and achieving strong sustainability.

[3] Mike Hannis, the author of the only monograph devoted to the issue of freedom and the environment to my knowledge writes: 'This has left the relationship between freedom and sustainability per se (…) significantly under-theorized' Michael Hannis, *Freedom and Environment. Autonomy, Human Flourishing and the Political Philosophy of Sustainability* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 4. Exceptions include Marius de Geus, 'The Environment versus Individual Freedom and Convenience', in *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism*, edited by Marcel L. J. Wissenburg and Yoram Levy (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87–99; Richard Dagger, 'Freedom and Rights', in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, edited by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 200–215. The question of liberty has been mentioned in early environmentalist writings, but without in-depth discussions of the concept itself; see Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science* 162:3859 (1968), pp. 1243–1248; Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, 2nd edition (New York: Universe Books, 1974). There is also a growing literature on liberalism and the environment as well as on republicanism and the environment, but neither of them focuses on freedom in its own right.

[4] Think of the debate over liberty between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians during the English civil war in the 17th century; or more recently of the debate over effective and formal conceptions of freedom between Marxists and Capitalists. See respectively: Quentin Skinner, 'Rethinking Political Liberty', *History Workshop Journal* 61:1 (2006), pp. 156–170 and Ian Carter, 'Debate: The Myth of "Merely Formal Freedom"', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 19:4 (2011), pp. 486–495.

[5] Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011); Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

However, these views reflect particular definitions of liberty, and other conceptions might change substantially our appraisal of what the state can or cannot do to address ecological problems. Hence, my aim here is to assess how different conceptions of liberty fare with respect to pressing environmental issues. In other words, I investigate and try to debunk the claim (often made by opponents of strong environmental policies) that meeting such ecological requirements is always detrimental to individual freedom.

The article is organized as follows. In section 2, I briefly introduce the notion of ecological limits and the constraints on economic growth and individual consumption that might follow from it. In section 3, I give some conceptual clarification about what is at stake. In sections 4 and 5, I consider different conceptions of liberty analyzed by Philip Pettit, and assess them comparatively in light of environmental constraints. I conclude that liberty as non-domination is more compatible with the notion of environmental limits than the two other conceptions considered.

2. Sustainability, Ecological Limits and Economic Growth

Since the first, rather vague, definition of sustainable development as the 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs',[6] various interpretations of the concept have been put forward. For instance, the 'weak' interpretation of sustainability holds that losses of natural capital (natural resources, biological diversity, habitats, climate stability, etc.) can be indefinitely offset by the creation of manufactured capital over the long term.[7] Conversely, a growing body of evidence suggests the existence of stringent limits to the exploitation of the natural environment. These limits can be roughly divided into two groups: those stemming from the exhaustion of natural resources (renewable and non-renewable), such as fresh water, arable land, fossil fuels and precious metals,[8] and those stemming from the limited carrying capacity of the earth system.[9]

The carrying capacity perspective in particular holds that human impact on the biosphere should stay within some identifiable limits if we are to avoid abrupt shifts in its functioning and the loss of valuable life-support services. This approach has been pioneered by the Meadows report in the late 1970s,[10] and is now represented by the 'planetary boundaries' model. Proponents of this approach identify nine biophysical

[6] World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[7] Werner Hediger, 'Reconciling "weak" and "strong" Sustainability', *International Journal of Social Economics* 26:7/8/9 (1999), pp. 1120–1144.

[8] See for example UNEP. 'GEO 5 - Global Environment Outlook' (Nairobi: UNEP, 2012), available online at http://web.unep.org/geo/assessments/global-assessments/global-environment-outlook-5 (accessed 2017-01-31); Kristin Vala Ragnarsdottir, 'Rare Metals Getting Rarer,' *Nature Geoscience* 1:11 (2008), pp. 720–721; G. Maggio and G. Cacciola, 'When Will Oil, Natural Gas, and Coal Peak?', *Fuel* 98 (2012), pp. 111–123.

[9] Kenneth. Arrow *et al*., 'Economic Growth, Carrying Capacity, and the Environment', *Science* 268:5210 (1995), pp. 520–521.

[10] For an updated version see Donella Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004).

thresholds (corresponding to domains of human influence over the earth system) that should not be transgressed. These include biodiversity loss, climate change, biochemical flows, land-system change, and so on.[11] Staying within these limits would help secure the stability of the earth system in a state as close as possible to the favorable Holocene conditions, which is of paramount importance for the flourishing of human civilizations. Hence the suggestion that these limits define a 'safe operating space for humanity'.[12] According to this increasingly popular view, sustainability amounts to keeping human influence within these boundaries, which requires a significant departure from the current functioning of developed societies.[13]

Now, if we take seriously the ideas that our environment is finite and that human societies must operate within the constraints of carrying capacity and resource availability, it follows that indefinite material (and maybe economic) growth is not possible. Originally, the cornerstone of sustainable development was the idea of decoupling economic growth from material consumption and environmental impacts, mainly by means of technological innovation. However, after thirty years without meaningful results in this direction, more and more people doubt that this is possible at all.[14] This remains a debated issue, but in any case environmental policies sufficiently stringent to limit irreversible and potentially catastrophic degradations of the Earth system would imply the existence of laws regulating material and energy flows. This can be achieved by means of taxation, allowances markets or norms on the production and use of technical devices. Such regulations can all be seen as coercive to a certain extend and would very likely constrain individual consumption patterns.[15]

Hence, without delving further into this fast growing literature, I take the three following assumptions for granted:

1. There are stringent limits to the exploitation of the environment. Transgressing them could cause unpredictable shifts in the functioning of the earth system, with dire consequences for human societies.

[11] Johan Rockström *et al*., 'Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity', *Ecology and Society* 14:2 (2009b), p. 32; Anthony D. Barnosky *et al*., 'Approaching a State Shift in Earth's Biosphere', *Nature* 486 (2012), pp. 52–58; Will Steffen *et al*., 'Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet', *Science* 347:6223 (2015), DOI: 10.1126/science.1259855.

[12] Rockström *et al*., 'A Safe Operating Space for Humanity'.

[13] According to the proponents of this approach, human influence over four of the nine boundaries – climate change, genetic diversity, land-system change and biochemical flows – is already beyond the 'safe zone'; see Steffen *et al*., 'Planetary Boundaries'.

[14] See Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth? Economics for a Finite Planet* (London: Earthscan, 2011); Joan Martínez-Alier *et al*., 'Sustainable de-Growth: Mapping the Context, Criticisms and Future Prospects of an Emergent Paradigm', *Ecological Economics* 69:9 (2010), pp. 1741–1747; Giorgios Kallis, Christian Kerschner, and Joan Martínez-Alier, 'The Economics of Degrowth', *Ecological Economics* 84 (2012), pp. 172–180.

[15] Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth?*; Susanne Menzel and Tom L. Green, 'Sovereign Citizens and Constrained Consumers: Why Sustainability Requires Limits on Choice', *Environmental Values* 22:1 (2013), pp. 59–79; Wouter Peeters, Jo Dirix, and Sigrid Sterckx, 'The Capabilities Approach and Environmental Sustainability: The Case for Functioning Constraints', *Environmental Values* 24:3 (2015), pp. 367–389; Jean-Louis Martin, Virginie Maris, and Daniel S. Simberloff, 'The Need to Respect Nature and Its Limits Challenges Society and Conservation Science', *PNAS* 113: 22 (2016), pp. 6105–6112.

2. In order to avoid that, societies will need to achieve a transition toward sustainability (that is, staying within the limits), which will require top-down regulations.[16]
3. This will affect the level of material and energy consumption and ultimately economic growth.

The rest of the article focuses on assessing the consequences of this prospect for individual liberty.

3. What Liberty?

The concept of liberty that I will discuss in the rest of this article is political liberty in a broad sense. In this sense, a conception of liberty must enable us to determine who is free and on what conditions, within a society that is itself embedded in an ecological context. As such, liberty is considered here a political value, that is, a good the state must protect and promote.[17] Thus the question I will try to answer is: which conception of liberty should be favored when fostering the ecological transition?

I propose that such a conception must meet two general criteria. The first one is *compatibility*. Among the many different conceptions of liberty that exist in theory and practice today, some seem indeed to be more compatible than others with the ideas of ecological limits and ecological transition. Thus, a first task consists in identifying which ones. By 'compatible' I mean that a given conception of liberty can thrive and be promoted despite the existence of stringent ecological limits or the absence of economic growth. Notice that this is slightly different from asking whether restrictions of liberty are justified or not. What I am after, here, is a conception of liberty that would not see ecological limits as an existential threat (justified or not).[18]

Yet, being concerned with compatibility is not enough. The second criterion is that of *desirability*. On top of being compatible with ecological limits, a conception of liberty compatible with sustainability must be appealing and plausibly achievable in the context of contemporary western societies. In other words, it must be sufficiently in line with these societies' current political culture. For example, an ascetic conception that identifies liberty with self-abnegation (which, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, amounts to stopping desiring what one cannot get[19]) is surely compatible with ecological limits, but it is unlikely to become an appealing political ideal in the foreseeable future.

[16] I will not attempt to justify this assumption here and redirect the reader toward the literature on collective action problems.

[17] This approach differs from the metaphysical debate about free will and determinism, which I will put aside in what follows.

[18] The fact that my analysis is intentionally restricted to political liberty, to the exclusion of all other political values, is a methodological choice that does not commit me to holding that liberty is the most important political value. In my view, it is totally conceivable to hold at the same time that liberty is an important value and that it can be overridden by the need to promote other values (such as justice or security for example) under certain circumstances.

[19] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, edited by Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 166–217.

This being said, delving into the very rich philosophical debate about which conception of liberty is normatively the most desirable is beyond the scope of this article, as is a comprehensive analysis of all the existing conceptions of liberty in light of environmental issues. By way of simplification, I will focus on the compatibility criterion and draw on Philip Pettit's typology of liberty. This typology provides us with categories that are admittedly fairly broad, but that are prototypical of the current debates about liberty. My aim here is rather modest. First, it is to show that all conceptions of liberty are not equal in the face of ecological limits. Second, it is to argue that non-domination inspired accounts of liberty constitute strong candidates with respect to the compatibility criterion. At this early stage of the debate, such a coarse-grained level of analysis seems suitable.

4. Option-Freedom

Philip Pettit's typology of liberty includes two broad perspectives and three specific conceptions of liberty he considers representative of the most predominant schools of thought in philosophical debates about liberty. The two perspectives, *option-freedom* and *agency-freedom*, are two different ways to understand what it commonly means to be free or what one focuses on when talking about liberty. As we will see, these two perspectives can also plausibly be interpreted as two *dimensions* of liberty. The three conceptions he delineates are liberty as *non-limitation*, liberty as *non-interference* and liberty as *non-domination*.[20] In this section, I present option-freedom and the two first conceptions. In the next section, I describe agency-freedom and liberty as non-domination.

According to the option-freedom understanding, liberty is a property of options. In other words, the liberty of an individual is a function of the number of options at their disposal, as well as of their diversity and significance. It also depends on the character of the access the individual has to their options. Access might be physically blocked, or burdened by difficulties or penalties. This broad focus on options can however accommodate various different conceptions of liberty. This appears more clearly when we consider the nature of the influences that can affect the pool of options of an individual. These option-limiting influences can be *impersonal* (e.g. natural facts such as impassable mountains, laws of nature, sickness, etc.) or *interpersonal*. And within the category of interpersonal influences, these can be *intentional* (e.g. physical violence, threats, laws, etc.) or *positional*, that is due to one's position (or feeling) of inferiority in society (e.g. self-limiting behaviors). Now, depending on which types of influence count as freedom-restricting, different conceptions of liberty can be defined.[21]

Liberty as Non-Limitation

This is the simplest case, because according to this conception every option-limiting influence counts as a restriction on freedom, whatever its origin. Here, being free in the relevant sense means not only the absence of natural impediments, but also the absence of prohibition or other interpersonal hindrances, intentional or not. In other words, the source of the limitations is irrelevant. In its simplest sense, liberty as non-limitation is a

[20] Philip Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (Polity Press, 2001); and 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15:4 (2003), pp. 387–403.
[21] Pettit, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom'.

purely quantitative version of option-freedom (only the sheer number of options counts), which means that maximizing liberty amounts to maximizing the size of each individual's set of options.[22] Two things are worth mentioning here in connection with environmental issues.

The first one is that liberty as non-limitation has a tight connection with economic growth. Indeed, economic growth usually results in an increased number of options at the disposal of economic agents (admittedly with huge discrepancies). It provides them with a fuller set of consumption goods and services for a lower relative price, including numerous means to move around, get informed, and the like. As such, economic growth can be considered a vehicle for liberty, and this seems to be consistent with the widespread idea that a larger set of options to choose from on the market is generally a good thing for the consumers (even though various social scientists have argued that this intuition is in fact an illusion, or that it is culturally and historically situated).[23] The corollary of this view, on the other hand, is that every hindrance to economic growth is at the same time a hindrance to the development of freedom.

The second comment follows from the first one. It is that environmental issues, at least as they are approached in this article, might conflict with liberty as non-limitation, in line with the *liberty vs scarcity* view.

Environmental degradations may indeed lead to a drastic decrease of the number of options at our disposal, either through the exhaustion of natural resources, or through damaging weather events such as droughts, tornados, heat waves, and so on. From the perspective of the transition to sustainability, the goal is of course to prevent these consequences from unfolding, by staying at safe distance from the planetary boundaries. However, as we saw in the first section, doing so might well necessitate to implement policies curbing the economic output (e.g. the regulation of production and consumption), which would have the effect of reducing the quantity and diversity of options at the disposal of individuals. For instance, driving an SUV might be prohibited or simply become too expensive for most people, the availability of exotic and luxury foods might be limited, and more generally, the variety of items available in stores might be severely reduced. Hence, it seems fairly clear that environmental regulations of that kind would be conflicting with liberty as non-limitation. We must thus conclude that this conception of liberty is not compatible with the aim of the ecological transition as I understand it in this article.

Nevertheless, what seems possible with liberty as non-limitation is to justify environmental policies, and the ensuing limitations on choice, as a way to avoid even more stringent limitations in the future as a result of an ecological collapse. In this case, liberty would be limited in the name of liberty itself, in line with an established liberal principle. This *prudential justification* is, however, vulnerable to the usual objections against environmental policies. For one thing, the individuals facing a reduction of their

[22] According to Pettit, this conception of liberty is advocated by economists concerned with showing how the market performs in enhancing freedom (see Robert Sudgen, 'The Metric of Opportunity', Economics and Philosophy 14:2 (1998), p. 307) and left-libertarians (see Hillel Steiner, *An Essay on Rights* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Peter Vallentyne, 'Left-Libertarianism and Liberty', in *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Christiano and John Christman (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 137–151).

[23] Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005); Sheena Iyengar, *The Art of Choosing* (New York: Twelve, 2011).

liberty as non-limitation due to environmental regulations (members of the current generation) would not be the same as those benefiting the most from these regulations (the global poor and future generations). For another, environmental regulations would have immediate effects with a high degree of confidence, whereas their benefits would be subject to considerable uncertainty. Furthermore, given the maximizing tendency of this conception of liberty, the acknowledgement of limits to growth, be it for a worthy cause, would translate into a permanent frustration of expectations. Hence, the prudential justification takes the shape of a politics of sacrifice and is likely to be seen as inherently coercive, which does not sound very appealing politically. As already mentioned, what we need instead is a conception of liberty that can thrive in a context of relative scarcity.

Liberty as Non-Interference

Let us turn now to another conception that is common among liberals and advocates of the free market. The background idea is that *interpersonal* interferences in the option set of individuals are morally worse than *impersonal* interferences, which seems plausible at first glance insofar as political liberty is at stake. According to liberty as non-interference, the only option-limiting influences that count as restrictions on freedom are of human origin and intentional (or at least negligent).[24] This conception goes back to Thomas Hobbes and has been put forward by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century.[25] More recently, it has been endorsed by many liberal political thinkers. For instance, Isaiah Berlin writes: 'You lack political freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings. Mere incapacity to attain a goal is not lack of political freedom'.[26] This distinction between lack of freedom and incapacity to act has two upshots. First, liberty in this sense is a purely formal concept, insofar as individuals can be said to be free to do things they do not have the means to carry out. As Joel Feinberg writes: 'Both the rich and the poor in our free country are equally at liberty to buy Cadillacs'.[27] Second, according to this definition of liberty, legitimate and democratic laws are themselves considered impediments to freedom.[28]

As should be clear by now, liberty as non-interference is less exclusively focused on the sheer number of options at the disposal of individual than liberty as non-limitation. In that, it strays somewhat from a pure option-freedom perspective and allows for greater emphasis on the social and political relations within society. At first glance, this seems to be an advantage in ecological terms, since liberty is not directly proportional to the amount of consumption goods and services available. The existence of ecological limits seems thus to have less bearing on freedom understood this way.

[24] Pettit, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom'.

[25] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). John Locke's theory of liberty is more ambiguous. Some parts of his writings seem to match this conception, whereas others seem to be closer to a republican conception of liberty.

[26] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', p. 169.

[27] Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 8.

[28] Which of course does not mean that limitations of liberty cannot be justified. But recall that we are exclusively interested in the compatibility criterion here, not in the justification of political coercion. Also, there are variations within the family of non-interference that might not be best captured by this general account. As already mentioned, going into the details of each conception is beyond the scope of this article.

However, the problem with liberty as non-interference is different. It is that it makes it more difficult to regulate collective action problems.

This appears clearly in the case of global environmental issues. Most contemporary environmental problems, from resource scarcity to the disturbance of ecosystem functioning to climate change, will have large impacts on the set of options of individuals. These constraints are however impersonal in character in that they are either of natural origin or the unintended side-effect of the current socioeconomic system (most plausibly a mix of the two). In any case, environmental impacts on societies do not fit the definition of a liberty-limiting influence according to liberty as non-interference. However, whereas these impacts do not count as infringements of liberty, the policies aiming to prevent these impacts, such as described in section 2 (e.g. the regulation of production and/or consumption practices), do count as such. There is thus an asymmetry against regulation. Moreover, and as a result of this asymmetry, this conception of liberty is insensitive to the prudential argument. It does not allow to justify losses of liberty now for the sake of preventing more important losses in the future, because the latter would actually not count as losses of liberty. In that respect, liberty as non-interference acts as a brake on the transition to sustainability. Like liberty as non-limitation, but for other reasons, this very influential conception of liberty does not seem to be fully compatible with the goal of a transition toward sustainability.

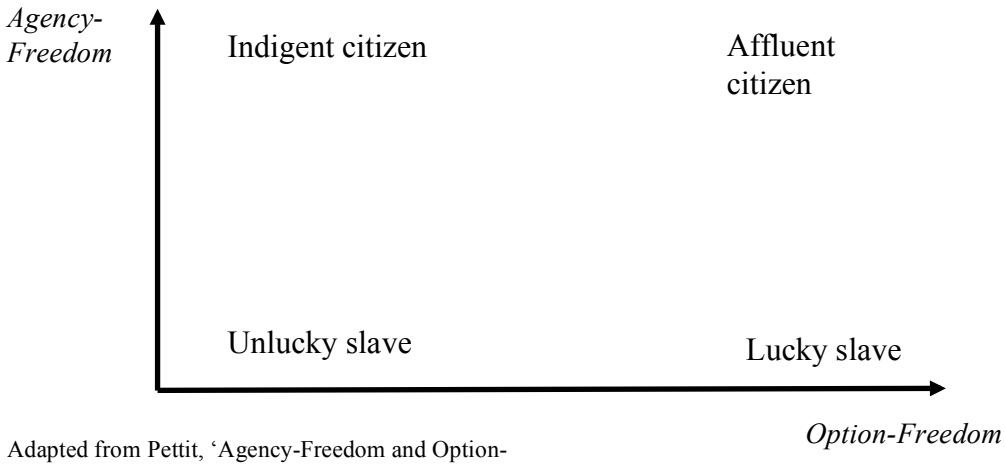
At this stage, the following objection might be raised. Historically, Western democracies have always been able to curtail liberty when necessary, for the purpose of achieving a goal of greater importance. The historical facts contradict my analysis and inaction toward environmental problems must therefore be due to some other reasons. However, first, I do not claim that the mainstream conception of liberty is the only reason explaining the current lack of motivation to tackle environmental problems.[29] My aim is much more modest. It is to investigate the implications of endorsing one conception rather than another. It is also to suggest that the currently predominant conception of liberty might play a role, among other factors, in our reluctance to act. Second, as already mentioned, I isolate the analysis of liberty for methodological reasons, but do not reject value pluralism. If it is true that a widely held conception of liberty is biased against regulation, it does not follow that regulation is outright impossible – other values might override liberty –, but only that the burden of justification becomes more demanding. Finally, I am not totally convinced that this historical argument is accurate. It seems that most limitations of liberty in western societies are either rather lax (e.g. taxation policies for social security or foreign aid) or instituted for the benefit of current citizens (e.g. security norms, criminal law, etc.), or were established in the face of an imminent threat and for a short period of time (e.g. rationing during wars or after natural disasters). The ecological transition will, however, involve new norms of production and consumption in the long term, and mainly for the benefit of future generations. As a result, it is arguably something quite different from what has happened in the recent past.

[29] For an analysis of moral and motivational issues in connection with climate change, see for example Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

5. Agency-Freedom

Let us turn now to the other broad perspective on freedom put forward by Pettit. Contrary to option-freedom, agency-freedom is a perspective that sees liberty as a property of the agent, and not of the options that they have at their disposal. This view draws on an ancient understanding of liberty, where being free is opposed to being a slave. As Philip Pettit puts it, agency-freedom amounts to 'not having to depend on the grace or mercy of others, being able to do one's own thing without asking their leave or permission'.[30] Liberty in this sense is the opposite of servitude and vulnerability. It is a kind of status, that of being protected against the arbitrary interferences of other individuals or the state. This can be achieved by providing constitutional and legal protections to individuals, along with institutions to which they can appeal in case of unlawful treatment, or by reducing important inequalities (that is, asymmetries of power). Importantly, this protection must be equally effective for all members of a society. Agency-freedom is thus an eminently political and relational kind of liberty that would mean nothing to an isolated individual.

To a certain extent, option-freedom and agency-freedom can vary independently from each other. This can be grasped easily when illustrated by a few fictional cases. Pettit enjoins us to consider the case of someone fully protected from the arbitrary interferences of others, say a citizen of some ideal democratic country. However, this person is so limited by poverty and physical disability that their set of options is very limited. This typically constitutes a case of agency-freedom without option-freedom (call it the *indigent citizen*). The symmetric case is that of a slave with a benevolent master. This slave is free to live his daily life as he sees fit, and enjoys a wide array of options (arguably like some imperial slaves in ancient Rome). Nevertheless, he remains vulnerable to a reversal of fortune at the whim of his master, who can decide at any moment to take everything back from him. This is a case of option-freedom without agency freedom (call it the *lucky slave*). These two examples, although sociologically unlikely, show that the two understandings of freedom do not always wax and wane together. They also show that both are plausibly valuable in their own right.



Adapted from Pettit, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom', p. 396.

[30] Pettit, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom', p. 394.

This distinction is of direct relevance when it comes to evaluating the impact of environmental limits on personal freedom. As we saw earlier, deprivations resulting from environmental degradations, or from regulations aimed at preventing them, have above all an impact on option-freedom. This can be the result of resource scarcity, extreme weather events or the need to avoid overshooting the carrying capacity of our planet. Yet, what Pettit's analysis of liberty shows is that there are other ways to understand what it is to be free than maximizing the quantity of options at the disposal of individuals. Moreover, as we will see shortly, agency-freedom is not hindered by laws and regulation when these meet certain criteria. This gives liberty as non-domination an advantage over the two other conceptions, from an environmental point of view.

Liberty as Non-Domination

There is at least one school of thought that has historically put emphasis on agency-freedom rather than option-freedom. It is the republican tradition, or at least a certain interpretation of it. According to this school of thought, what counts when it comes to liberty is not the absence of interference in itself, but the absence of domination. Here, being dominated means being vulnerable to the unchecked power of interference of others. In this sense, the fact that arbitrary interferences are merely *accessible* to the dominating agent counts as lack of liberty, even if interferences do not actually materialize (as in the case of the lucky slave). Accordingly, being free amounts to being protected from the arbitrary power of others. If this is not the case, an individual could have to resort to servility, flattery or self-censorship to avoid upsetting the person she depends on (husband, employer, teacher, government, etc.). These attitudes are symptoms of domination and are considered harmful to the dignity of human beings.[31]

This conception of liberty goes back to roman thinkers such as Cicero and Livy, and has been taken over during the Renaissance by Machiavelli and other political theorists. English republicans in the 16th century and authors of the *Federalist Papers* have also endorsed a similar conception, before it got overshadowed by liberty as non-interference in the 18th century.[32] Today, liberty as non-domination is usually referred to as neo-roman or neo-republican.[33]

According to this account, liberty as non-domination is primarily concerned with agency-freedom, which constitutes the very substance of liberty. Once again, freedom is above all a status. However, option-freedom constitutes a secondary concern and cannot be completely ignored, for at least two reasons. First, the laws and policies aiming to

[31] Pettit, *Republicanism*.

[32] *Ibid*.; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998); Skinner, 'Rethinking Political Liberty'.

[33] See also Maurizio Viroli, *Republicanism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (Eds.), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008). There is now a small literature devoted to the republican tradition and its relation to environmental problems. However, this literature usually focuses on issues such as republican constitutionalism, citizenship and the common good, and rarely tackles the question of liberty more than in passing. See for example: Steven Slaughter, 'The Republican State: An Alternative Foundation for Global Environmental Governance', in *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis*, edited by John Barry and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 207–227; John Barry, 'Towards a Green Republicanism: Constitutionalism, Political Economy, and the Green State', *The Good Society* 17:2 (2008), pp. 3–11.

protect citizens against the arbitrary interferences of others are themselves blocking a certain number of options, which means that the two perspectives are in fact not totally independent from each other.[34] Second, agency-freedom without any options at one's disposal, if it means something at all, would be a purely formal ideal. This seems to be politically rather unappealing, as the indigent citizen example shows. Expanding the range of (undominated) choices brings benefits in terms of liberty in that it broadens the scope of free agency. Hence, being free always comes down to not being dominated *relative to* a given set of options.[35]

As a result, an advocate of liberty as non-domination must answer two questions:

1. What are the formal criteria that allow us to identify domination?
2. What set of options should be protected from domination?

As we will see, the answers to both of these questions highlight the greater compatibility of liberty as non-domination with stringent ecological limits, and hence it superiority over the two other conceptions when it comes to transitioning toward sustainability.

1. As already mentioned, being dominated amounts to being *vulnerable* to the *arbitrary* interferences of other individuals, collectives or governments. First, the vulnerability criterion indicates that the mere possibility of arbitrary interference is sufficient to constitute domination, and hence a loss of freedom. It is enough for my purpose to describe vulnerability very generally, as at the same time a lack of external protection and an imbalance of power between an agent and the others. Second, the arbitrariness criterion allows to distinguish between domination and mere interference. Interferences that are non-arbitrary, even though they affect the set of options of individuals, do not constitute domination, and therefore do not count as a loss of liberty. According to Pettit, an act of interference is non-arbitrary 'to the extent that it is forced to track the interests and ideas of the person suffering the interference'.[36] Thus, in order for a State not to dominate its citizens, its decision-making procedures must allow for an effective and equally shared control of the citizens on decisions, or offer avenues for decision-makers to be held accountable. If a law is backed by such an institutional context, it is non-dominating and can be enacted without harming the liberty of the citizens.

There are thus three possible scenarios:

a. Domination with interference (e.g. the harsh master of the unlucky slave)
b. Domination without interference (e.g. the benevolent master of the lucky slave)
c. Interference without domination (e.g. the non-arbitrary law of a democratic state)[37]

[34] Pettit, *Republicanism*, pp. 104–105.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 76; Philip Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), Ch. 3.

[36] Pettit, *Republicanism*, p. 55.

[37] Notice that in society 'neither interference nor domination' is not really possible, insofar as at least some interferences are necessary to protect individuals against domination.

From the point of view of liberty as non-domination, only a. and b. are genuine cases of non-liberty, with a. being worse than b. In other words, interference is an ill only when it is accompanied by domination. According the republican tradition, not only is the law not at odds with liberty, it is also constitutive of it. There can be no liberty where there are no laws and institutions, because they provide (when properly designed) the most effective protection against domination.

This constitutes a first advantage over liberty as non-interference, with respect to environmental issues. Provided that a non-dominating institutional arrangement is in place, liberty as non-domination is indeed not biased against regulation as liberty as non-interference typically is, which is especially useful when it comes to solving collective action problems. The shift of emphasis that the republican view proposes, to agency-freedom and away from option-freedom, means that it is possible to remain free under stringent environmental policies, in an appealing and meaningful sense. Once again, this is true only as long as these policies and their implementation are subject to open accountability and contestation.

There is however at least one potential difficulty here. If some particular environmental policy mainly benefits future people to the detriment of currently living citizens, the argument goes, it is hard to see why it would be deemed non-dominating. Indeed, it seems that this policy would not be 'forced to track the interests and ideas' of the people it directly affects (that is present people). Here, for reasons of space, I can only briefly sketch an answer.

The response has to do with the definition of arbitrariness. The literature usually distinguishes between two types: substantive arbitrariness (laws are arbitrary when they are enacted without taking the relevant interests, ideas, and worldviews, of affected parties into account) and procedural arbitrariness (laws are arbitrary when there is simply no procedural constrains imposed on their making). Now, from a purely substantive point of view, stringent environmental policies would arguably not be dominating the current generation, if ecological values and justice toward future generations were an important part of their worldview. However, most advocates of republicanism include at least a procedural component in their definition of arbitrariness.[38] In Pettit's work this takes the form of procedures allowing for a certain level of control by the citizenry on the making of laws.[39] In that respect, if regulations aiming to achieve sustainability meet this criterion they are not dominating, even if they are prejudicial to current citizens' immediate interests.

2. The second question a theory of liberty as non-domination must answer is that of what set of options the State ought to protect from domination. As already mentioned, increasing the quantity and variety of non-dominated choices at the disposal of individuals amounts to enhancing the use they can make of their agency-freedom. Option-freedom is therefore of importance, although only secondarily. However, there is no principle of maximization at work here, as is the case with liberty as non-limitation. The number and variety of options is not valuable in itself, but only instrumentally as a way for citizens to enjoy fully, and equally, their status of free persons.

[38] Frank Lovett, 'What Counts as Arbitrary Power?', Journal of Political Power 5:1 (2012), pp. 137–152.

[39] Pettit, *Republicanism*, p. 55; *Just Freedom*, pp. 111–115.

The ultimate goal of a republican polity is to allow individuals to 'walk tall' and be able to lead an independent and meaningful life.[40] Agency-freedom plays an important role in achieving this, but as we saw, it has to span across a set of options that is itself meaningful. However, there is no indication that maximizing the number of options is the right means to achieve liberty. On the contrary, two aspects of the republican perspective are arguably of importance here. The first one is relational equality and the second one is a kind of sufficiency threshold. Let us briefly discuss them in turn.

Recall that for freedom as non-domination to prevail, the protection from domination must be equally effective for all members of society. This points to a relational conception of equality, rather than equality of condition (wealth, resources, etc.) that allows individuals to relate to each other as free and equal citizens.[41] It suggests that what is important here is not having as many options as possible, but that a set of *particularly important* choices be protected and provided equally to everyone. Pettit's method to identify these important options more precisely is to derive them from the requirement that everybody must be able to enjoy them at the same time. Even though the exact content of this minimal set of options (he calls them 'basic liberties') depends on the cultural, technological and economic context of each society, some general categories can be proposed, such as liberty of thought, speech, association, and the like; or the liberty to move, change occupation or choose one's leisure activities.[42]

Now, individuals need resources to enjoy their basic liberties, but these resources can become scarce under certain circumstances. In the context of the ecological transition, for instance, access to some natural resources (such as fossil fuels, materials and food products) might be restricted. Similarly, an economy without growth would plausibly have fewer goods and services to offer. Under these conditions, the ability of citizens to move, to change occupation or to spend their leisure time as they see fit, might be limited. From a republican point of view, this is arguably not a problem as long as citizens have a decent amount of choice with respect to their basic liberties. The aim is nothing more than providing each individual with the means to live a meaningful life, on an equal footing with their peers. Doing so in a society that strives to stay within stringent ecological limits might require giving priority to fundamental needs and important options such as basic liberties over more trivial options such as consumption choices.[43] However, as should be clear by now, this does not prevent individuals from enjoying fully their liberty as non-domination.

As a result, the answer to the second question shows that liberty as non-domination has two decisive advantages over liberty as non-limitation. First, unlike

[40] This corresponds to what Pettit calls the *eyeball test*, namely that everyone should be able to look the others in the eyes 'without reason for fear of deference' (Pettit, *Just Freedom*, p. 99).

[41] See Elizabeth S. Anderson, 'What Is the Point of Equality?', *Ethics* 109:2 (1999), pp. 287–337.

[42] Pettit, *Just Freedom*, Ch. 3. This same idea also applies to states within the international order. In this case, Pettit calls the minimal set of options that must be protected from domination 'sovereign liberties'. Interestingly, for him, this system of co-enjoyable sovereign liberties implies that the exploitation of national and common resources must be constrained by a set of international rules ensuring the sustainability of practices (*ibid*., pp. 162-165).

[43] This shows that liberty as non-domination is plausibly highly compatible with capabilities floors and ceilings. For an excellent analysis of basic capabilities and autonomy in the context of environmental issues, see Hannis, *Freedom and Environment*.

liberty as non-limitation, it has no maximizing tendency that ties it to economic growth. Moreover, it provides a plausible explanation for why it is appealing, despite this lack of maximization (in short, because the option-freedom component is only instrumentally valuable, as a way to support the agency-freedom component). Second, it establishes a hierarchy between the options that are central to the functioning and dignity of individuals in society, and the options that are more trivial. In sum, liberty as non-domination is more compatible with the existence of ecological limits than both liberty as non-limitation and liberty as non-interference.

Conclusion

Humanity is confronting various environmental issues – climate change, biodiversity loss, resource exhaustion, etc. – that represent serious threats to the well-being and the stability of numerous societies. As the planetary boundaries model shows, tackling them all would mean significantly curbing anthropogenic material and energy flows, which could in turn stall economic growth. On this basis, it has been argued that environmentalism was at odds with individual liberty. However, this is not true of every conception of liberty.

A simple conceptual analysis shows that liberty as non-domination is more compatible with ecological limits than the two other conceptions considered. Adopting it as a political ideal would thus facilitate the transition from the high-energy profile of current societies towards sustainability. On the one hand, unlike liberty as non-interference, liberty as non-domination is not biased against the regulation of collective action problems. On the other hand, it does not conflict with a reasonable reduction of the sheer quantity of choice available on the market. Liberty as non-domination is primarily social and political in nature, in that it is defined by the type of relation that ties individuals with one another and with their government. Consequently, it can flourish even in a context of stringent ecological norms and limits, provided that these allow for institutional stability and reasonable individual agency.[44]

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[44] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ISEE annual meeting in New York City, in June 2016. I would like to thank the audience of this conference and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I also gratefully acknowledge support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (Grant P300P1_161110).

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