

Do Unto Others

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“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” doesn’t mean you should assume that other people will like the same things as you.

The golden rule doesn’t mean you should buy chocolate ice cream for others merely because you like chocolate ice cream. It doesn’t mean you should throw surprise birthday parties for your friends just because you happen to love surprise birthday parties.

The golden rule is a principle of moral symmetry. It simply means that you should consider other people’s unique needs, concerns, and sensitivities just as you would like them to consider your unique needs, concerns, and sensitivities.

Do you want people making rash assumptions about what you like? Probably not. Do you want people to do things for you without factoring in your own peculiar preferences and tastes? Probably not. Do you want people to think “Well, I like X so I’m sure you’ll like X too” without regard for how you might differ from them? Probably not.

If you really want to treat other people how you want to be treated, then you need to find out how they want to be treated. After all, that’s probably what you’d like them to do for you.

At least that’s the way I see it.

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