Branching Is Not Justice:

What Many-Worlds Can and Cannot Say About Cosmic Fairness

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Abstract

The thought that every choice is lived out somewhere can make an Everettian universe appear fair: perhaps each person eventually experiences every alternative and thereby receives the consequences of every decision. This analytical essay reconstructs that intuition as the author's starting point and examines its separate physical, metaphysical, and normative commitments. Everettian branching does not establish that every conceivable choice occurs, that attention selects a branch, or that will changes branch weights. Physical measurement concerns interactions and experimental arrangements; it supplies no support for conscious control of outcomes. Nor does branching establish one subject who experiences all successors' lives. Even granting suitable personal continuity, causation, responsibility, and desert remain distinct: undergoing an outcome cannot establish that it is deserved, and suffering alone establishes neither fault nor consent. Drawing especially on Dekker's arguments about appropriate consequences and Qureshi-Hurst's treatment of identity and responsibility, the essay offers a clarifying synthesis rather than a novel result. What survives is a conditional account of responsibility toward branching successors and an ordinary account of how expectations can influence conduct. Neither establishes cosmic fairness, but both preserve practical reasons for care.

Keywords: Everett interpretation; personal identity; moral responsibility; desert; cosmic fairness

1. Introduction: an attractive starting point

My starting intuition was that multiplicity might repair the apparent unfairness of a single life. We make decisions under limited knowledge, lose opportunities, and encounter consequences that seem disproportionate to what we intended. If every choice were lived out in another branch, perhaps no possibility would really be lost. If every alternative life belonged to the same person, perhaps that person would eventually experience the consequences of every choice. The universe might then possess a completeness that everyday experience conceals. What looks like an arbitrary distribution of fortune from one perspective could belong to a larger, fair arrangement.

The intuition deserves a charitable reconstruction because it contains more than a desire for reassurance. It expresses dissatisfaction with arbitrary luck, takes choices seriously, and seeks a perspective wider than immediate experience. It can also express humility: the life I see may not exhaust reality. None of these impulses requires believing that victims deserve their injuries. The strongest initial version is therefore a question rather than a doctrine: could a branching universe ensure that each person encounters the full significance of their actions, and could that completeness constitute fairness?

Yet several claims enter that question. There is a physical claim: that every relevant alternative occurs. A separate, optional claim sometimes added to this picture is that attention or will selects a branch; the fairness argument need not depend on it. There is a claim about identity: that the persons in different branches are one continuing subject. There is a temporal claim: that this subject eventually undergoes every alternative. Finally, there is a normative claim: that this comprehensive experience amounts to justice. Each needs its own justification. Their emotional coherence cannot substitute for an argument connecting them.

The thesis is that the proposed connection fails at several points. Everettian multiplicity does not establish that every imagined alternative is realized, and it gives no reason to posit a mechanism by which consciousness chooses branches or changes their weights. Branching leaves unexplained how one subject could experience every successor's life. Even if such an experiencer were independently defended, experiencing a consequence would not establish desert. The most general lesson concerns an inference from what occurs to what is owed. A description can identify outcomes and their causes without settling whether those outcomes are fair, whether someone should bear their costs, or whether another person must help. This essay synthesizes existing arguments about Everettian branching, personal identity, and the normative consequences of choice, drawing especially on Dekker (2009), Qureshi-Hurst (2024), and Price (2010).

Two more modest ideas survive. The first is a conditional account of responsibility: if there are appropriately related successors, and if independently justified standards of agency and responsibility apply, decisions can matter morally for those successors and for others. The second concerns ordinary expectations: beliefs about what is possible can influence planning, persistence, and conduct without selecting quantum outcomes. Both locate practical agency within conditions that need further justification rather than deriving justice from the universe's structure.

2. Reconstructing the inference to cosmic fairness

The initial argument begins with the thought that physical reality contains alternatives to the observed outcome. It then expands alternatives into every choice a person could have made. Next it treats the people in those alternatives as a single subject, imagines their separate histories as experiences that subject will eventually possess, and interprets the resulting completeness as a distribution of deserved consequences. This sequence can feel seamless when expressed through the word "I." It becomes less secure when "I" must identify a particular agent, successor, or collection of people.

Consider a person deciding whether to accept a risky undertaking. One outcome is success; another involves serious injury. The intuition says that both outcomes occur somewhere and that the person therefore gets both the benefit and the cost. This is supposed to defeat the unfairness of receiving only an unlucky result. But there are already different interpretations. Perhaps two successors separately encounter different outcomes. Perhaps one subject encounters both through an unusual relation of personal identity. Perhaps the whole collection is treated as the morally relevant unit. These are different claims, and only the second supports the language of one person undergoing everything.

Even that interpretation leaves "eventually" unexplained. Temporal succession concerns what follows what within a history. The existence of different histories does not establish a later

moment at which their experiences become one person's accumulated biography. An observer who remembers success is not thereby awaiting the injury experienced by another successor. A further account would be needed to show, for the specific promise that one subject successively experiences every life, that experiences converge, are shared, or belong to a subject capable of accessing them together; this is a demand of that promise, not a condition on every theory of identity across branches. Branching alone supplies none of these additions.

Fairness also has several possible meanings. It might mean that everyone has the same chances, that everyone receives the same total welfare, that benefits track responsible choices, or that no one suffers undeserved harm. A physical multiplicity of outcomes does not make these standards equivalent. Equal opportunity could coexist with unequal welfare; equal welfare could coexist with unjust treatment; a deserved reward could coexist with an unrelated injury. The argument cannot move between these standards whenever one becomes difficult to defend.

The most charitable target is therefore a limited conception of cosmic fairness: the universe itself ensures an appropriate relation between each person's agency and what that person undergoes. This gives the argument something definite to establish. The appropriate relation cannot simply mean causal dependence, because hurricanes and infections also have causes. Nor can it mean that every possibility is represented, because representation says nothing about appropriate treatment. Fairness requires a normative account of why these experiences should belong to these persons in these proportions or under these conditions. This target also excludes a distinct question: whether Everettian branching affects the fairness of particular allocation procedures once claims and goods are independently specified.

A defender might withdraw the stronger language and say only that every possible life has a place in reality. That thought may have existential significance, but it changes the claim. Completeness becomes an account of what exists, rather than a reason why suffering is justified. Another defender might value the thought that no alternative self is wholly excluded. Again, that preference falls short of showing that the injured successor has been treated fairly. A metaphysical picture can be consoling without making the ethical inference valid.

The following discussion grants branching for the sake of argument. It does not try to establish the Everett interpretation against competing interpretations of quantum mechanics. This conditional approach matters because the fairness inference fails even under generous physical assumptions. If a branching universe contains the relevant alternative outcomes, we must still identify who experiences them, what choices produced them, and which standards connect those choices to legitimate burdens. Refusing the inference to justice therefore does not require resolving the interpretation of quantum mechanics first.

3. Physics: branching, measurement, and the limits of will

Consider first the physical stage. Everettian accounts treat observation within the physical description rather than as an exception to it. Stein presents Everett's proposal as applying Schrödinger evolution to observation as well as to isolated processes (Stein 1984). In Qureshi-Hurst's introductory account, the universal state evolves deterministically, while branching supplies a multiplicity of outcomes associated with quantum events; she deliberately proceeds on the "Radical" version of Everett for her own discussion, which is not a consensus definition among Everettians (Qureshi-Hurst 2024, pp. 458–459). These descriptions provide a setting for

the philosophical question. They do not supply evidence that a conscious observer stands outside the physical process and directs its result.

The restriction to physically represented outcomes is essential. Physical possibility under the laws is not sufficient for realization in the actual universal state. In the decoherence-based picture used here, the relevant alternatives must occur with nonzero weight in an appropriate, approximately decoherent history structure generated from that state. "All possibilities occur" is dangerously expansive when possibility can mean anything a person can imagine. A history inconsistent with the relevant physical conditions does not become an Everettian branch merely because someone can describe it. Nor does a quantum alternative automatically correspond to a deliberated human choice. A person's considering two actions is a psychological event; establishing that both actions are realized requires a physical account of the relevant alternatives. Branching cannot be used as a blank cheque for every imagined biography.

The same caution applies to the claim that every decision creates a world. Qureshi-Hurst's discussion includes branching processes that do not depend on human deliberation, and she notes the difficulty of assigning an exact branch count (2024, pp. 458–459). Zurek explains effective classicality through environmental monitoring and selection of stable states, with observers treated as physical systems that acquire and process information (Zurek 2003). The relevant point is that decision is not a privileged fundamental trigger. Human actions can participate in physical processes without creating a special exemption for will.

The familiar observer effect does not repair this gap. Measurement arrangements involve physical interactions and the availability of records. A change in an apparatus or its environment can alter an experiment without consciousness functioning as an independent controller. Hornberger and colleagues report suppression of fullerene interference as background gas pressure increases, in quantitative agreement with collisional decoherence theory (Hornberger et al. 2003). That is evidence about interaction with a gas. It does not identify awareness, hope, or focused attention as the relevant experimental variable.

This distinction does not deny that conscious people affect experiments. An experimenter can adjust an instrument, prepare a system, choose a measurement arrangement, or decide whether to intervene. These are physical actions with physical consequences. The stronger claim is different: with the relevant physical preparation and interactions held fixed, attention chooses the experienced branch or alters its weight. Neither an observer's participation in an experiment nor the existence of measurement effects supplies that additional mechanism. Moving from physical intervention to direct mental selection changes the proposition under discussion.

Branch weights also need to be distinguished from simple existence and from branch counts. Sebens and Carroll offer an argument for Born-rule credences through self-locating uncertainty and an additional principle concerning environmental changes (Sebens and Carroll 2018). The argument's importance here is limited: the authors offer reasons for a particular treatment of probability, rather than treating each described branch as equally probable merely because it exists. Their argument is not an account of choosing a preferred branch through desire. Whether their probability proposal succeeds is a separate debate from whether consciousness controls outcomes.

An intention can nevertheless matter through everyday preparation. Someone who intends to improve their health might seek treatment or change a routine; an experimenter who wants a different result might alter the preparation. Such conduct changes relevant physical circumstances. Saying that Everett gives no support to direct mental reweighting does not imply

that actions leave outcome structures unchanged. It means that any change must be explained through the action and its physical effects, rather than inferred from the intensity of the person's wish. The familiar causal route remains available.

These points support a conclusion about warrant, not a universal proof against every conceivable theory of mind. Everettian branching does not establish attention-based selection or will-based changes in weights. A theory proposing such effects would need explicit assumptions and evidence beyond the mere existence of observers and branches. This essay offers no theorem excluding every possible addition to physics. For the fairness argument, the narrower conclusion is sufficient: the optional claim of mental selection receives no support from branching alone. The physical stage therefore removes one pillar of the inference while leaving the remaining stages to carry their own weight.

4. Identity: successors are not automatically one experiencer

The next problem remains even if all relevant outcomes occur. Physical multiplicity does not settle the identity of the people who undergo those outcomes. Two successors may share memories and a common earlier history while having different subsequent experiences. Calling both "me" can express anticipation, concern, or psychological continuity. It does not by itself establish one numerically identical subject who experiences both lives. The fairness intuition uses this ambiguity to turn separate outcomes into a comprehensive personal reckoning.

Qureshi-Hurst directly examines persistence and fission in relation to moral responsibility, especially in a theistic setting (2024, pp. 460–465). Her discussion considers multiple occupancy, restrictions on branching identity, and survival without numerical identity. These are substantive alternatives to assuming an unproblematic enduring self. The essay does not claim to resolve the alternatives she discusses, and it does not infer that physics has already settled the metaphysics of persons.

A familiar logical difficulty helps locate the issue. If two successors are distinct, standard numerical identity cannot simply relate each to the earlier person while retaining all its usual properties and treating all three as ordinary, separately individuated persons. Identity is transitive: unrestricted identifications would identify the successors with each other. But this observation does not decide every theory of fission. An account may revise how persons are counted before branching, distinguish persons from stages, or distinguish survival from identity. The logical difficulty is a demand for an account, not a complete argument that every account must fail.

Psychological continuity can connect one earlier stage to several later stages without behaving like numerical identity. Both successors may remember the same promise and retain the same plans. That gives a reason to ask whether each inherits obligations. It does not supply an automatic answer. Inheritance might depend on ownership of a commitment, continuity of a practical standpoint, or an independently defended rule about successors. Establishing such a rule would require moral argument as well as a metaphysical relation. Similarity alone is insufficient, since mere resemblance does not normally transfer another person's debts or blame.

There is a corresponding danger in arguing too quickly in the opposite direction. If strict identity is disputed, it does not follow that every successor is exempt from responsibility or that no commitment continues. An account of responsibility might attach importance to continuity, agency within a history, or an appropriate relation to an earlier act. Whether that account succeeds

remains open. The essay therefore rejects both automatic universal identity and automatic moral erasure. An unresolved persistence problem does not license whichever ethical conclusion is most convenient.

Even if a theory identifies both successors with one person, it must explain whether and how a benefit in one successor's life compensates a loss in the other's. Shared memory or experiential integration is not a necessary condition of compensation in general: even in everyday life, a benefit that arrives after an injury is forgotten can compensate the very person who was injured. The present objection is that branching alone supplies neither the relevant account of personal welfare nor a justification for overriding a suffering successor's claims. Relabelling the successors as one person cannot do this work.

Price's discussion makes these concerns relevant to decisions. His treatment of caring about descendants and his "Legless at Bondi" example cast doubt on easy transfers between everyday risk for oneself and concern for multiple successors (Price 2010, arXiv version, §§5–7). In the example, consent to a procedure seems rational until the patient learns that a cloned twin will bear the loss; that new information changes the assessment, whatever the branch weights. It directs attention to whose interests and permissions a decision actually concerns.

The identity stage thus blocks the temporal promise at the heart of the initial intuition. There may be multiple related future lives without one subject eventually living them in sequence. Even if some stronger account of shared identity were defensible, it would still need to explain the distribution of experience. What follows morally from the relation among successors would remain a further question. A branching picture gives reasons to investigate persistence; it does not complete that investigation or turn its unsettled conclusions into justice.

5. Justice: causes, responsibility, desert, and claims to help

The decisive normative mistake is to treat undergoing a consequence as evidence that the consequence is deserved. Causation asks how an outcome arose. Moral responsibility asks whether an agent appropriately answers for some action or outcome. Desert asks whether a benefit or burden is fitting in virtue of a relevant basis. These questions interact, but none can be replaced by the bare observation that someone is experiencing pain. Being the patient of an event is not the same as being its author or deserving recipient.

Qureshi-Hurst illustrates the separation between causal and moral responsibility through accidental and deliberate injury (2024, p. 460). A person can participate causally in another's injury without acting with the volition she treats as relevant to moral responsibility. The distinction matters here even without accepting her complete conditions for responsibility. The accidental-injury example shows only that causal involvement is insufficient for blame. Independently, illness or injury can occur without any culpable action by the sufferer; experiencing harm therefore does not by itself establish blameworthiness. The fairness argument moves further than even a simple causal inference when it reads moral significance directly from the victim's experience.

Dekker makes a closely related point about the assignment of consequences. Responsibility-based theories may guide social arrangements while leaving underexplained what consequences particular choices should carry. He argues that they need a theory of consequences and that the most plausible such theories are substantive and desert-based (Dekker 2009). This essay draws

on that argument without claiming that Dekker discusses Everettian cosmic fairness, or that he proves every possible account of justice must ground all its conclusions in desert.

The general relevance is straightforward. Even when an action is responsibly chosen, deciding what should follow is a further task. A rule about medical assistance, a rule about punishment, and a rule about compensation can assign different significance to the same choice. Their justification requires attention to rights, proportionality, institutions, or other normative considerations. Branch weights and successor relations do not themselves specify these rules. An inference from responsible agency to the fittingness of whatever outcomes follow a choice omits the very standards that determine the appropriate stakes.

Bognar reinforces the caution within luck egalitarianism. He argues that the distinction between brute luck and option luck cannot itself determine the outcomes for which people should be held responsible, and that the theory remains incomplete without a better account of attribution (Bognar 2019). The lesson is not that every responsibility-sensitive theory is refuted. It is that classifying a situation as involving choice does not finish its ethical analysis. Calling a quantum gamble voluntary likewise leaves open the extent and kind of burdens that may legitimately follow.

Suppose someone knowingly accepts a small danger in order to pursue a worthwhile project. A bad outcome occurs. The person may be causally involved and may have exercised genuine agency. It remains a further question whether assistance is owed, whether compensation would unfairly burden others, or whether the person deserves suffering. These conclusions can diverge. One might support a limited cost-sharing rule, or assign repair duties, without treating the pain itself as deserved. A responsibility-sensitive allocation rule may assign treatment costs without claiming that the patient deserves pain. Three propositions must therefore be assessed separately: whether conduct is blameworthy, whether its agent should bear specified costs under justified rules, and whether suffering is deserved. Refuting the third does not refute the second, and none follows from branching alone.

A successful outcome in another branch does not automatically compensate the injured successor. Compensation normally requires an account of whose loss is repaired and how the remedy reaches or benefits that person. If the relevant unit is a collection of successors, an aggregate improvement might make the collection better by some standard while leaving one member injured. That observation does not refute aggregation as such. It shows why an aggregate score cannot, without an additional argument, be described as compensation received by each suffering subject. Fairness to a collection and fairness to each member are different assessments.

Nor does exhaustive realization amount to consent. Consent is standardly a feature of an agent's informed authorization, within appropriate conditions and concerning some specified intervention or risk. The fact that an outcome occurs somewhere records no authorization at all. A successor's shared past may be relevant if an earlier person gave valid consent, but whether and how that consent extends to successors must be defended. The existence of an alternative successor who approves cannot retrospectively authorize what happens to the one who does not.

These distinctions leave room for disagreement about desert and institutional justice. The argument does not select one complete distributive theory, prove that all outcome inequalities are unjust, or establish a universal entitlement to identical treatment. Its narrower conclusion is that physical realization and experienced consequences do not settle those disagreements. To make the universe fair in the relevant sense, an argument needs more than an inventory of outcomes. It needs a justified account linking persons and actions to appropriate treatment, and

branching by itself leaves that account undeveloped. What the fairness inference presents as a verdict of cosmic justice is, at this stage, only an inventory awaiting a standard.

6. Suffering alone does not establish fault or consent

One possible practical danger of the initial intuition arises when it becomes an explanation of another person's suffering. A person is injured, ill, abused, or deprived; the proposed cosmic framework says that this must be a consequence belonging to their larger self. Unless independent evidence is supplied, that explanation demonstrates no choice, fault, or permission. It attaches moral significance to an event after observing it, while leaving the relevant agency unexamined. The resulting narrative can feel complete because it assumes the correspondence it was supposed to demonstrate.

Consider a child suffering from an illness. The observation of pain does not identify an informed decision by that child. Invoking another branch adds a different history or a related person without establishing that the suffering child controlled the relevant event. Invoking an encompassing self adds a disputed identity claim without showing consent. Even if the physical illness has a complete causal explanation, the moral explanation remains absent. A causal history need not be an account of fault, and the need for care does not wait for a cosmic biography.

The same reasoning applies to deliberate abuse. An aggressor's action can explain a victim's injury without the victim having chosen it. Assigning the event to the victim's thoughts or alternative self can displace scrutiny of the aggressor's conduct. The occurrence of a branch containing abuse establishes no permission from the person abused. A branch containing a different response by a counterpart would not change that. The relevant questions concern the actual act, its agent, the conditions of control, and the victim's claims, rather than a compensating story elsewhere. This is a conceptual risk of the inference, not an empirical finding here about the effects of Everettian beliefs.

A defender may say that every branch contributes to a larger justice whose details are inaccessible. As a possibility, this is difficult to evaluate without further assumptions. As an inference from Everettian physics, it fails: inaccessible justice is an additional hypothesis, not an implication of branching. The same applies to the suggestion that suffering serves a cosmic purpose. An account of purpose would need independent grounds. Neither the number of outcomes nor their coexistence provides a reason why a particular person's suffering should be treated as deserved or authorized.

The asymmetry of the evidence should remain clear. Showing that suffering establishes no fault does not prove that every person who suffers is free of every unrelated wrongdoing. It means that suffering, by itself, supplies no warrant for the attribution. A person's conduct can be investigated through evidence relevant to conduct; their consent through evidence relevant to authorization. Pain cannot perform either evidential task merely because a theory says all relevant nonzero-weight decoherent alternatives occur. This restriction protects the distinction between moral inquiry and retrospective storytelling.

The argument also leaves practical obligations open to their proper grounds. Someone may have a duty to rescue because of need, proximity, a professional role, or a prior commitment. No inference from branching suspends them. Likewise, deciding what resources a community owes a person requires a social and moral argument. The universe's containing a fortunate

counterpart cannot substitute for treatment, protection, or assistance reaching the person who needs it here.

7. Open conditions for responsibility in a branching world

What remains is a list of unresolved conditions, rather than a defended account of responsibility in a branching world. Assume that some defensible relation connects an earlier agent to later successors. Assume also an independently justified account of agency that distinguishes competent, informed, sufficiently controlled conduct from coercion, manipulation, and accident. Finally, assume a normative account of the consequences relevant to particular obligations. Under those assumptions, branching need not prevent moral appraisal. But these are substantive conditions, not results delivered by the physical description, and their joint satisfaction has not been proved here.

Responsibility can first be considered within an experienced history. A successor deliberates, acts for reasons, and affects other people. Whether those capacities ground responsibility depends on a theory of agency. Qureshi-Hurst identifies serious difficulties for securing identity and freedom in Everettian accounts, particularly where theistic judgment demands more than practical justification (2024, pp. 460–471). Her challenge deserves acknowledgment. The present conditional account does not refute it by redescribing everyday deliberation. It asks what would follow if the required agency conditions could be defended, while leaving that defense unfinished.

The existence of another successor doing otherwise does not automatically excuse this successor's wrongdoing. If an agent knowingly harms a neighbour in one history, the existence of a helpful counterpart elsewhere does not show that the harmful action was coerced, uninformed, or outside the agent's control. Conversely, existence of a harmful counterpart does not automatically cancel another successor's responsible aid. These judgments remain conditional on an account of who the agents are and how actions belong to them. The point is that multiplicity alone supplies neither exoneration nor condemnation.

Before an outcome is registered, deliberation may also concern the welfare of future successors. Greaves presents Everettian probability in terms of rational caring about future branches without requiring primitive identity or subjective uncertainty, while acknowledging a cost concerning the plausibility of Measurement Neutrality (Greaves 2004). Price argues that the new Everettian ontology gives rational agents new objects of concern, so that rationality does not require the Born-weighted decision rule the Deutsch-Wallace-Greaves argument mandates (Price 2010). These discussions frame concern for successors as an open debate, not a settled foundation.

A decision rule using weighted outcomes could guide action under further assumptions. Yet a rule for evaluating prospects and a rule specifying what an injured successor is owed answer different questions. Even an accepted Born-weighted assessment would not by itself determine whether someone has waived a right, forfeited assistance, or incurred a particular liability. These conclusions require normative premises about claims and commitments. Deliberation within these conditions may be weight-sensitive without identifying physical weights with degrees of moral worth or measures of deserved suffering.

This limitation is especially important for consent to a gamble. An earlier agent's informed authorization may matter, but one must specify its content, its relation to the successor, and

the rule governing its effects. Price's existing discussion already brings pressure to bear on easy appeals to prior consent (2010, §6). Nothing here establishes that successors always retain all claims, or that prior consent never binds them. Nor does it establish a distinctive objection to every responsibility-sensitive allocation rule.

The conditional account thus preserves a practical question rather than a cosmic verdict: given a defensible account of agency and succession, how should we treat those affected by our choices? Some answers may remain close to familiar ethics; others may depend on the structure of branching. Establishing either would require further argument. What is already clear is that the bare multiplication of consequences does not eliminate the need to ask. This essay has not established that these conditions are jointly satisfiable; it has established only that multiplicity alone neither supplies nor defeats them.

8. Expectations and conduct

A separate, ordinary hypothesis is that expectations can affect outcomes through changes in conduct. The examples below illustrate that possibility; they are not evidence of its psychological effects. A person who regards a project as achievable may prepare more carefully, seek advice, or continue after a setback. Someone convinced that nothing can help may fail to take an available step. These examples specify possible pathways from belief to action; they do not amount to a universal psychological law. Whether an expectation helps depends on its content, the person's circumstances, and the opportunities available. No appeal to quantum branching is needed to describe the proposed causal route.

The distinction is between changing one's conduct and claiming direct control of outcomes. Preparing for an interview can improve the conditions under which performance occurs. It does not guarantee employment, because other applicants, institutional decisions, and circumstances remain relevant. Likewise, expecting recovery may influence whether a person follows a treatment plan, without making the person's thoughts sovereign over illness. These conditional examples preserve agency while identifying the intermediate actions through which an expectation could matter. They do not transform hope into a physical selection rule.

Empirical work on manifestation beliefs is limited in what it can show here. Dixon, Hornsey, and Hartley report associations between stronger manifestation beliefs and perceived success, ambitions, interest in risky investments, reported bankruptcy, and expectations of rapid unlikely success (Dixon et al. 2025). These associations do not test the causal pathway proposed above. They are compatible with causal influence in either direction and settle neither; nor do they test a mechanism for branch selection. Their relevance is cautionary and limited: confidence and optimistic self-description cannot simply be identified with successful outcomes. There is no contradiction in rejecting quantum manifestation while retaining a practical role for attention. Attending to a task can be part of working on it; identifying a goal can organize action. The warranted claim names the behaviour and the circumstances rather than treating attention as an unexplained force. An individual can prepare well and still encounter a bad result, and a bad result therefore does not establish insufficient belief, hidden consent, or defective character.

This modest account changes the original ambition. Instead of asking how to direct oneself toward a branch where justice has already been secured, it asks how expectations can support responsible conduct under uncertainty and limitation. Appropriate expectations remain revisable in response to evidence. They can motivate attempts to relieve suffering while acknowledging

obstacles beyond the agent's control. That account offers something actionable without giving metaphysical reassurance authority over the lives and claims of other people.

9. Conclusion

The starting intuition joined several attractive thoughts: alternatives might be real, personal existence might be wider than one biography, and consequences might ultimately fit choices. Separating these thoughts reveals that none establishes the next. Everettian multiplicity does not imply the realization of every imagined decision, conscious branch selection, one subject's eventual experience of all successors, or an appropriate moral distribution. Each transition requires an additional argument, and the final transition requires normative standards that physics does not supply.

The central ethical conclusion survives even generous assumptions about the earlier stages. Suppose the relevant outcomes all occur and some defensible relation unites their subjects. It still does not follow that their suffering is deserved. Causal involvement, accountable agency, appropriate stakes, consent, and desert remain distinct. A fortunate counterpart does not by itself repair an injured person's loss, and an observed injury, taken alone, shows neither fault nor authorization. These limits concern what follows from the premises, rather than a complete theory of how every case should be judged.

Dekker's account of the need to justify consequences and Qureshi-Hurst's investigation of identity and responsibility already frame much of this terrain. Price and Greaves likewise supply established debates about concern for successors and Everettian decision. The essay's role is to bring these questions into a clear assessment of cosmic fairness, not to announce a new solution. The conditional account of responsibility remains conditional on defended accounts of agency, succession, and obligation. The account of expectations remains an ordinary story of expectations acting through conduct. Neither warrants the claim that the universe is fair.

Recognizing this failure need not diminish practical responsibility. It removes an unsupported reason for treating suffering as self-justifying and returns attention to the persons affected, their actions, their circumstances, and their claims. The possibility of other futures can invite reflection. It cannot decide what anyone deserves. Justice remains something to justify and pursue, rather than something established by branching.

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