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Increasing effective charitable giving: The puzzle, what we know, what we need to know next

PI: Reinstein (for now); Other co-authors: Fitz, Kagan, (possible: Nemirow, Robin Bergh, Paul Smeets, Janek Kretschmer, Yoeli, others)

[Parallel notes/work found HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#heading=h.zf0eu3jghz5z) (I.e., further details to avoid cluttering this up)

Links to detailed writeups provided throughout

# 1.​ Presenting the challenge: What explains our ineffective giving[[1]](#footnote-0)

When faced with the “girl drowning in the pond” [Singer ref (https://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/videos#pondvideo)] we are willing to sacrifice substantial wealth to save a life and express horror at those who would not do[Bugatti example, Singer’s TLYCs]. However, most people *don’t* make large donations to the very poor, even though lives can be saved for less than $10,000 [Givewell estimate of around $4-8k to save a life here], and vastly improved for roughly $500.(cost of Fistula surgery here) [stats on amounts given here]

This is probably not for lack of generosity; individuals do give substantial amounts (e.g., US charity represents roughly 2% of GDP [ref: GivingUSA or similar], and intra-family transfers are far higher [ref]) However, most charitable donations go towards charities that are worthwhile but improve well-being far less per dollar than basic medical interventions in poor countries, such as antimalarial bednets (see [Givewell, 2016](http://www.givewell.org/giving101/Your-dollar-goes-further-overseas)).[[2]](#footnote-1)

These facts presents two related, puzzling questions: 1. Why don’t we give more to the most effective charities and to those most in need?, and 2. When we *do* donate, why are we not more efficient with our charitable choices?[[3]](#footnote-2)

Social science, biology and philosophy present a range of potential theoretical explanations of how values, preferences, and biases drive this “inefficient altruism” and limit the amount donated to the most effective causes.

We aim to provide a useful conceptual and organizational framework for this question, bringing together perspectives from Psychology, Economics, and Biology. While related surveys have considered (XXX) (see section “​1.4.​ Previous literature reviews and surveys, lack of previous work”), our paper takes a uniquely comprehensive look at the question of obstacles to effective giving,

We further present a rigorous assessment of the evidence. Evidence for these factors (e.g. for “availability bias”, or for “scope insensitivity”) comes largely from small-scale experiments, often involving hypothetical choices, or in domains outside of charitable-giving. Where researchers *have* been able to work with fundraisers on larger-scale natural field experiments, these have mainly involved single-charity specialized appeals and events for targeted audiences, and treatment variations often combine multiple differences; it is not clear to what extent the results apply to the overall population and to charitable giving in general.[[4]](#footnote-3)

It can be difficult to distinguish robust, credible findings from one-off results vulnerable to hype, p-hacking and publication-bias (echoing the “replication crisis” in experimental social science [REF]). Given the limited, scattered findings, we do not yet have a definitive picture of which factors substantially impact effective giving (henceforth “EG”).[[5]](#footnote-4) This paper synthesizes and evaluates the existing evidence on this. We critically consider each proposed factor, considering the designs, methodologies, data and evidence, emphasizing replication, convergent evidence and robustness; favoring rigorous, replicated evidence, in line with the tools and standards of the “credibility revolution in social science”.[[6]](#footnote-5) Through this paper and its accompanying resources, we provide an informed judgement as well as organized building blocks for more formal meta-analyses. We present a rigorous picture of “what we know, with what confidence, and where we need to explore further.”[[7]](#footnote-6)

## ​1.1.​ (Motivation) Why should you care about this? Descriptives of giving (US, international) and how 'ineffective' it is. Who does give effectively? Potential global welfare gains to changing “where we give.”

* References making this same point: McCaskill, Gertler, Science of Giving... [Quotes [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#heading=h.zf0eu3jghz5z)]

**(Motivation) Why should you care about this?** Descriptives of giving (US, international) and how 'ineffective' it is. Potential global welfare gains to changing “where we give.”

* *References making this same point:* McCaskill, Gertler*,* Science of Giving...

Nemirow: “Effectiveness doesn’t track popularity with donors... Using ratings of financial efficiency and transparency as a proxy for efficacy [(Oppenheimer and Olivola 2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/lJEeEp/N59C), observed a correlation of .002”

*Evidence and descriptives on giving behavior*

*Who does give internationally/effectively (descriptives)? Briefly define the EA movement as an important force “we” (economists, psychologists) need to discuss. (Or put this at bottom?)*

Fitz/Kagan: Understanding Effective Givers: In this study we attempt to understand who is predisposed towards effective giving. After providing a description of the effective giving movement, we measure support for effective giving and measure a wide range of personality traits and demographics that may predict support for effective giving. [Fill in key findings here, other sources]

## 

## 1.2. Is this a puzzle?

Utilitarianism

→ Normative (why not?)

There is a strong case to be made for moral utilitarianism, and surveys show strong agreement with the following statements… [++] To the extent that people's behavior is fundamentally at odds with this, it may be seen as a puzzle.

Why (under what models) is this a puzzle? Economics and psych models → puzzle? Models where people care about the impact of their gift or just 'amount sacrificed' (naive warm glow). Does impact map into the 'good feeling' from giving, can it do so?

* Baron: “we propose utilitarianism, or the totality of good that comes about from a choice, as our gold standard for assessing the effectiveness of choices make in the context of charitable contributions”

Are people Utilitarians?

**​**

*Preferences/values: To what extent does a “moral utilitarian’ ethic govern beliefs and behaviour?[[8]](#footnote-7)”* To the extent it does, the limited effective giving represents a puzzling intention/action gap, potentially driven by biases and ‘barriers’. For non-utilitarians this is no puzzle; however, specific campaigns, tools, and fundraising approaches may still help align their parochial, self-interested, or reputation-seeking values and intentions with more effective giving.[[9]](#footnote-8)

→ Descriptive (prominent model wrong? Why does the prominent/reasonable model differ so much from model of own-consumption)

Prominent descriptive model: Charity as “consumption good motivated by universal desire to help others”

A common conception[references: Impact model; Gertler; ‘Science of Giving’, Burm citations?… straw man?] considers giving a form of consumption, motivated by concern for others (as well as for intrinsic social goods such as the preservation of animals). In this conception charitable donations, like standard goods, may have diminishing marginal returns, implying that individuals will consume each up to the point that the last dollar gives them the same value as the last dollar spent on anything else they consume. If the last dollar spent on one good yields more benefit than the first dollar spent on some other good, the individual will not purchase any of the latter. Thus, if one charity always provides less of the “desired outcome” per dollar than another charity, the individual will donate only to the first charity. If the *outcome* they are purchasing is *impact on the welfare of others* (especially considering humanitarian/poverty charities) such individuals would only give to the one charity that can alleviate the most suffering or save the most lives per dollar.[[10]](#footnote-9)

Most individuals (ref?) in wealthy countries also state agreement with statements such as “all humans have equal value”, and “we should not privilege one life over another” [I’m making this up for now, let's get an actual reference; WVS?]. Thus, if their concern for others is in line with this stated belief, they should donate only to the most effective charities (in the sense described above), regardless of the country or population targeted.ref: Cause neutrality Furthermore, if the “good” being purchased is “helping others”, the willingness to sacrifice one’s own consumption to do this should not depend on the context.(cf the drowning child example).

This issue is raised by numerous authors:

McCaskill...

“The Science of Giving” (2011) contrasts giving towards the Indian Occean Tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake, and September 11 victims. “A startling level of inconsistency in the way donations are raised and allocated to needy recipients… mirrored by biases in media attention. (Armstrong ea ‘06, Eisensee & S ‘07, Slovic ‘07)”…. Simple analysis finds a near-zero correlation to Charity Navigator efficiency/transparency ratings… [This references Oppenheimer and Olivola]

“So, if people’s donations aren’t governed by the amount of the need or the quality of the organizations, what are the factors that govern charitable giving?”Is this a quote or our own words?

Gertler**: “**Given that information on charities’ work is available to the public, why do trade-offs like that between guide dogs and eye surgery still exist? Basic economic theory holds that similar goods should not differ widely in price, but while no major restaurant chain sells a $500 hamburger5, some major charities still offer very expensive services that accomplish much less good per dollar than their cheaper equivalents. If the purpose of charity is to help other people, why are the world’s most effective charities not also the most popular? How can relatively ineffective charities continue to thrive?”

Even if they are not cause-neutral, there are still very clear differences in effectiveness even *within fairly narrowly defined causes[Examples]*, and even among charities serving similar populations[examples].

We may take the evidence to suggest that “having an impact on outcomes” is not the sole nor even the main driver of giving choices. Furthermore, there is evidence that efficiency/impact is often not a major part of the decision processref, and recognizing this, fundraisers do not consistently advertise a charity’s “bang for the buck” [evidence/ref] [[11]](#footnote-10). To the extent that donation behavior is *not* substantially driven by moral utilitarianism, the “puzzle” is less obvious: people give to when and where giving makes them feel good (or avoid feeling bad). The value a donor attains from the donation “purchased and consumed” need not have any connection to its impact on outcomes. Still, to the extent that donations are driven by these *non-impact-related factors*, assessing the relative importance of these factors, and their relative (non)-alignment to effectiveness, will inform “EA responses”. E.g., if empathy is attenuated by cultural distance [[section 2.3,3](#_lbkwiv86qb86)], charities helping culturally isolated groups may use social media and direct communication to lessen this distance. If signaling empathy to peers is driving giving, and this is particularly easy to coordinate for charities that appeal to emotions ([Section 2.4.3](#_rjkmnyglsdvq)), effective charities may seek ways of tying effectiveness to emotional stimuli, and finding ways of making donation outcomes visible on social media.

Still, it seems too strong to suggest that donors “never care about effectiveness”, and to reject MU as a substantial motivator: charities *do* substantially advertise their good works, and the value of these, and XXX strengthen this argument . If people *are* substantially moral utilitarians, their lack of effectiveness is clearly a puzzle demanding explanation(s). We consider ways they may simply be *bad* at being effective, particularly in the giving domain. E.g., they may be *unaware* or *insensitive* to certain needs, because of distance or lack of media coverage (see section [2.3](#_h4e51xeo2wo0).). They may have quantitative biases [(section 2.7)](#_81beqa7wlnqq), such as insensitivity to the scope of a problem, misunderstanding the importance of overhead, or neglecting opportunity costs. Alternatively, they may have more fundamental obstacles to doing such evaluations (section [2.6](#_3b9th6ie5hck)), finding it innapropriate or painful to consider effetiveness in this domain; the act of making these analytical considerations may also reduce their feelings of empathy. Other barriers are institutional and inertial (section [2.5](#_cb2e7egwqaej)) or more difficult to classify.

To the extent that lack of effective giving is a puzzle, it may be a puzzle with *too many* explanations. We aim to organize these explanations and consolidate those that overlap. Admittedly, it is often difficult to distinguish between a departure from MU and a bias or obstacle to effective MU optimization. We discuss conceptual issues with these classifications in section [2.2](#_dto2wbbyjh26), and we ultimately adopt what we believe to be a *practical* categorization.

1.3.​ Overview of research Question/Problem: Why don’t people give in an evidence-based way?

People make evidence-based decisions when they invest/buy, but typically not when they give (why?).  References: Berman ea, '18 - hypothetical; other references to ‘share of people who consulted a rating when they made their donation decision’ ,[Hope Consulting]

What are the psychological motivations for *not* giving effectively?.

People say they want to give effectively (Money for Good)

- Intention/Action gaps

- People say they want to do good and be effective, but they don’t actually - Why?

There are biases that hurt effective charities, and make it harder to think about things that are most effective

Miller, evolutionary concerns:

* Make us not want to be utilitarians?
* Make our system-1 instincts distract us from this?
* Make our system-2 bad at optimization and judgement (esp in this domain).

Broadly

* “Information is weak”; limited feedback (cf, own-consumption direct experience)
* People are not utilitarian? System 1 is not utilitarian even if system 2 is (and it distracts)? System II cognitive judgements are particularly bad at this (biases/ barriers)
* Other structural and social barriers

## ​1.4.​ Previous literature reviews and surveys, lack of previous work

Comparison of outlines [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#)

* Ideas42: "We did not find many field-based, experimental studies on the factors that encourage people to choose thoughtfully among charities or to plan ahead to give. "

Effectiveness-specific:

* Gertler, “[Charitable Fundraising and Smart Giving](https://aarongertler.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Aaron-Gertler-Senior-Thesis-full-bibliography-1.pdf)"
* [(Baron and Szymanska 2011)](http://f1000.com/work/citation?ids=5505890&pre=&suf=&sa=0) - Heuristics and Biases in Charity: Largely conceptual, minimal survey of specific empirical/experimental papers ([outline here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#))

Loewenstein and Small (“Scarecrow”) -- survey; theme is similar to review in ‘07[[12]](#footnote-11)

See also:

* [Charity Science: Trials and synthesis of research for Effective Altruism Outreach](http://www.charityscience.com/outreach-research.html)
* Geoffrey Miller's "10 cognitive and emotional challenges in EA"
* Nemirow presentation: Psychological Phenomena Hindering Effective Altruism
* Yoeli: “Hidden Motives Behind Ineffective Altruism”

Charitable giving, more general

* [Bekkers and Wiepking, (2011). "A Literature Review of Empirical Studies of Philanthropy: Eight Mechanisms That Drive Charitable Giving” esp “Part 2: why do people give”; Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly](http://www.wiepking.com/papers/BekkersWiepking_2011_NVSQ.pdf): “awareness of need,” “solicitation,” “costs and benefits,” “altruism,” “reputation,” “psychological benefits,” “values,” and “efficacy.”
* Andreoni and Payne (2013). Chapter 1 “Charitable Giving” in Auerbach, Alan J., et al., eds. Handbook of Public Economics. Vol. 5. Newnes;
* Andreoni (2006), “Philanthropy” in Handbook of Giving, Reciprocity and Altruism
* “Gift giving: an interdisciplinary review” [Sargent and Woodliffe](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/nvsm.308/abstract) (2007), Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing
* List (2011). Econ Perspectives or List (2008, ExpEcon), “Introduction to field experiments in economics with applications to the economics of charity”
* Zagefka and James, 2015, “The Psychology of Charitable Donations to Disaster Victims and Beyond”, Social Issues and Policy Review
* Also: Duncan (2004); Atkinson (2008)

...Less academic:

* [Ideas42- Behavior and Charitable Giving](http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Behavior-and-Charitable-Giving_ideas42.pdf)
* [Science of Philanthropy Initiative 'Practical Takeaways](http://spihub.org/resources/practice)
* [Behavioural Insights Team (2013), “Applying Behavioural Insights to Charitable Giving.”](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/publications/applying-behavioural-insights-to-charitable-giving/)
* Behar: “Camber Collective’s three Money for Good reports ([2010](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55723b6be4b05ed81f077108/t/566efb6cc647ad2b441e2c55/1450113900596/Money+for+Good+I.pdf), [2011](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55723b6be4b05ed81f077108/t/55d24c66e4b05537993238fc/1439845478132/%24FG+II_2011_Full+Report.pdf), and [2015](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55723b6be4b05ed81f077108/t/56957ee6df40f330ae018b81/1452637938035/$FG+2015_Final+Report_01122016.pdf)) each include significant research (generally from focus groups) on donor preferences regarding intermediaries.”
* “EA profiling” work:[[13]](#footnote-12)

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# ​2.​ Explaining the puzzle: Barriers to EA giving and potential responses, evidence

## ​2.1.​ A major underlying issue: Are charities in competition? Is the ineffective giving reducing effective giving? Ask people to give to EA charity “instead”? [discussion and evidence]

Does one ask (or donation) crowd out another... when and how? This is critical to understanding the extent to which gains can be achieved by getting people to 'switch' from other charities. To the extent this is the case, factors driving giving to the non-EA charities, especially local obligations (e.g., neighbors pressure you to give to local orgs) themselves represent barriers to EA giving (see below).

(David Reinstein has a simultaneous research project on this 'expenditure substitution' question; can ‘paste extract’ here].)

(Reinstein, '10), (Meer, '17), Donkers2017, Diepen2009, scharf2015disaster, reinstein2010does, meer\_2017, deryugina2015causes, Harwell, van2009does, reinstein2010substitution

## ​2.2.​ Barriers considered (economic, psychological, systemic)

1. As noted above, if people have fundamental Utilitarian preferences and values,[[14]](#footnote-13) then the charitable giving patterns present a puzzle. We might consider what “barriers” are preventing people from being effective Utilitarians. Below, we discuss conceptual and functional categorizations. The conceptual categorization is more theoretically rigorous, but implies a great deal of overlap and ambiguity for particular cases; we thus use the functional categorization in presenting the practical barriers and evidence.

### ​2.2.1.​ Conceptual classifications of barriers to EG

1. We briefly consider the process and elements that would lead people to or away from EA behavior. Essentially, people must deeply want to be EA, they must be aware of both the idea of EA and the evidence, they must be able within their society’s constraints to donate effectively, they must be adept at choosing efficiently, and their emotions must not override their cognition.
2. Base values may be non-utilitarian (a ‘barrier’ not a ‘bias’): "People may fundamentally not be Utilitarian in their values and goals. Thus they may not even try to maximize others' well-being in their charitable giving, even when acting analytically and consciously. They may be parochial, they may want to signal particular traits, or they may have other motives entirely
3. Misinformation/lack of awareness (of needs/effectiveness and/or of utilitarian arguments)
4. Systemic: Social, economic, and institutional factors impede effective giving (even if people are utilitarians and want and know how to be effective)
5. Judgement/cognition failures: (even if utilitarian), in using system-II to maximize, they make mistakes and do this sub-optimally, due to misperceptions, cognitive biases, logical errors. They do this in ways that particularly make them less effective (although, by definition, any departure from maximization does this somewhat). Some biases tend to hurt more effective charities in particular. We will focus on those biases that have a particular impact given the current mis-allocation. We pose the thought-experiment/heuristic “(addressing) which biases will have the greatest impact on effective giving?” (“If we could snap our fingers and remove this barrier from the world, would this disproportionately increase giving to Effective Charities?)

* Limitations to processing information and understanding utilitarian maximization
* Some biases/factors just move decisions away from effectiveness because they maximize on a different metric
* Conceptual Barriers: Biases in perceiving impact (or in perceiving the importance of impact)[[15]](#footnote-14)

1. Emotion overrides cognition: System-1 hijacks and frustrates attempts to be analytical in making charitable decisions; relatedly, system-1 sustains generosity but it is turned off by switching to an analytical mode. Moral emotions not aligned to effectiveness (and 'crowding out'/moral licensing may exist) (Miller).

### ​2.2.2. A practical classification of barriers

The above conceptual definitions do not easily map into practical specific barriers and biases; we thus offer a less theoretically-rigorous classification to aid exposition. (Here we do not discuss simple ‘non-utilitarian motives’).

Awareness and consideration

Whether a cause/charity is something people are aware of, feel is important/salient, and feel close to.

Identity

Things that run against one's self-perception and how one believes others will will see you.

Inertia and systemic/institutional; Inherent

Factors limiting individual and social change in behavior

Longstanding or inherent societal and material factors

Obstacles to doing evaluations (CBA is a component)

Things that make people reluctant to evaluate and consider the effectiveness of charities, and ways that doing these evaluations reduce generosity.[[16]](#footnote-15)

Quantitative biases

Problems dealing with numbers and making logical evaluations involving numbers, values and amounts. Common cognitive errors or intuitive and emotional reactions triggered in these contexts

## ​2.3.​ Barrier: Awareness and consideration

1. (Whether a cause/charity is something people are aware of, feel is important/salient, and feel close to.)

### ​2.3.1.​ Distance - Spatial/Physical: parochial altruism/ingroup bias

### ​2.3.2.​ Distance - Temporal (future problems and people)

### ​2.3.3.​ Distance - Social/Cultural (interpersonal and identity e.g., race, gender, age, etc)

### ​2.3.4.​ Distance - Hypothetical (probability to happen)

### ​2.3.5.​ Distance - Emotional (Small’s paper)

### ​2.3.6.​ Consistent problems aren’t in the news

### ​2.3.7.​ Social/geographic distance attenuates empathy (and other motivators), aka, parochialism[[17]](#footnote-16)

(Info enhancing) social closeness of recipient -

?cuddy\_ea\_2007 (Sudhir ea, '16)

## ​2.4.​ Barrier: Identity

1. (Things that run against one's self-perception and how one believes others will will see you.)

### ​2.4.1.​ Self-interest/local public good

### ​2.4.2.​ Cognitive dissonance [or is this ‘inertia’]

### ​2.4.3.​ Social perceptions and signaling empathy vs effectiveness

### ​2.4.4.​ [Not sure where this one belongs:] Barriers: Strong local appeals ('the ask'), social obligations to give locally, and need for “virtue-signaling” (and 'crowding out'/moral licensing may exist)

* 1. - most of this belongs above we won’t completely separate factors determining ‘ask your neighbors’ from factors determining giving
  2. - However there is the ‘local public goods’ and self-interest issue

(Meer, '11)

Look into: Ratner ea, ‘11 “the norm of self interest”, in the Science of Giving -- ‘people feel it is only culturally acceptable to donate to causes in which they have a personal stake’ I

2b. Barriers: Cognitive dissonance with previous decisions and identity, family/cognitive decisions

## ​2.5.​ Barrier: Inertia and systemic/institutional factors

1. (Factors limiting individual and social \*change\* in behavior)

### ​2.5.1.​ Social norms

### ​2.5.2.​ Asks

(also recall cognitive dissonance here)

1. (Longstanding or inherent societal and material factors)
2. All

## ​2.6.​ Barrier: Obstacles to doing evaluations

* 1. (Things that make people reluctant to evaluate and consider the effectiveness of charities, and ways that doing these evaluations reduce generosity)
  2. In general, this is largely overlapping the concept of “Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) aversion” (or simply finding it less appropriate/normal/virtuous)
  3. Link to David’s discussion [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UWUEihJ-XpgW4VJSNDPnwHk8LLx9_xoT8mXArlONK50/edit)
  4. Link to Nick’s discussion [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XKHhkznR6bj-DKPUkAInZrNXBMF0CpDtaluilDh0LqM/edit)
  5. Ari’s notes [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11hINulIECcgv4mv7WVpz3UhSyaQ1fIjQz8AmxHEoMlw/edit#heading=h.7muf8zjnf5k4)

### ​2.6.1.​ Market & Social Norms

Effectiveness may be seen as switching charity to a ‘market activity’/market norm. This may seem repulsive and inappropriate and thus people avoid it.

### ​2.6.2.​ Taboo Trade-Offs (c.f., Protected Values)

### ​2.6.3.​ Cost effectiveness (analytical) information may turn off System-1 and reduce giving; statistics diminish impact of 'identifiable victim'

* Preliminary notes [LINK](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VqcZ4Um00dgzTtrOX_8dxtLIebRsN789aBd6F1FS9jY/edit#)

Barriers: Avoiding information, motivated reasoning in processing it andreoni2017avoiding, Exley2016, Exley2015, dellavigna2012 Kellner\_EA\_2017,

* Format for each: Description, Theoretical/conceptual discussion, Relevance to EG, Evidence (“e.g,. “People rarely seek out effectiveness information and are reluctant to purchase it”)

What about?: Avoiding information, motivated reasoning in processing it andreoni2017avoiding, Exley2016, Exley2015, dellavigna2012 Kellner\_EA\_2017,

## ​2.7.​ Barrier: Quantitative biases

1. (Problems dealing with numbers and making logical evaluations involving numbers, values and amounts. Common cognitive errors \*or\* intuitive and emotional reactions triggered in these contexts.)

Cognitive biases: Overweighting and underweighting probabilities (relates to availability bias)[[18]](#footnote-17), misunderstanding marginality (e.g., marginal vs average, also relates to drop-in-the-bucket, which could also be system-I), scope-insensitivity,[[19]](#footnote-18) Opportunity-cost Neglect., confirmation bias, status quo bias, identifiable victims effect (system 1), etc.

Responses: De-biasing, etc.

small2007sympathy, Gneezy2014 ein2013giving, kogut2005identified, kogut\_2005b, Kinsbergen\_tolsma\_13

### ​2.7.1.​ Scope insensitivity

Description

People's stated valuation or “willingness to pay” for an outcome seems not to strongly increase in the magnitude of that outcome. For example, when asked in isolation people might say they are willing to pay $50 to save 100 eagles. Other people asked in isolation may say they are willing to pay $50 to save 5000 eagles.

Theoretical/conceptual discussion here

There is some imprecision in defining this for the individual charitable donation context.

Relevance to EG

When assessing effectiveness in determining which charity to donate to ( and how much), a utilitarian should be very sensitive to the scale of the impact (essentially the benefit per cost). If people are scope insensitive they will be bad at making these judgments (particularly when presented in isolation). However, it is hard to envision a remedy for this; if there is a massive scope of need, one could present a donor with a small portion of this only, but a donor who does research will learn of the larger scale.

Evidence

Discussion/evaluation of general evidence

Discussion/evaluation of specific evidence here

### ​2.7.2.​ Proportional dominance effect/drop in bucket/psychosocial numbing

* Ari Kagan’s notes [HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zzGTkF5sZnDUtzE-NS3sYOHOLQw8eDxC5Qt3_Wy62wA/edit?ts=5aeb75c1#)
* David’s notes [linked HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JtodnZZeSd0ZfkjgnuNe-RaxE3SJpGBArPaULQs-TNE/edit#)

### ​2.7.3.​ Biases in perceiving impact (or in perceiving the importance of impact)[[20]](#footnote-19)

Responses: De-biasing, etc.

small2007sympathy, Gneezy2014 ein2013giving, kogut2005identified, kogut\_2005b, Kinsbergen\_tolsma\_13

### ​2.7.4.​ Misunderstanding need

### ​2.7.5.​ Availability heuristic

### ​2.7.6.​ Number of deaths (they’re already dead)

### ​2.7.7.​ Statistical victim effect

### ​2.7.8.​ Overhead aversion

### ​2.7.9.​ Opportunity cost neglect

Not sure where this belongs:

## ​2.8.​ 2b. Barriers: “Waste aversion”; Perfectionism/deontological aversion to 'waste' (or excuse-driven, motivated reasoning), Perceived lack of transparency, and perceived/actual corruption overseas (‘protected value’); “risky charities”

"Overhead aversion, Information about recipients' deservingness -, "Avoid uncertainties/excuses not to give/mental transactions costs - "

1. Effective charities tend to operate in ldc’s, which tend to have higher corruption indices.
2. Aversion to overhead will lead people to be biased against evidence-based charities that evaluate their own programs

(Gneezy ea, '14), (Fong & O, '10), (Exley, '16b) (Andreoni ea, '17), (Dellavigna ea, '1

and

# ​3.​ Tools for motivating EA giving

## ​3.1.​ Psych/behavioral tools; applicability to EA charities

Briefly highlight those 'tools' that give non-EA an advantage, but focus on the actionable--how EA lessen or flip that advantage. 2. Which tools present particular challenges or opportunities for EA

Recipient's plight as 'loss' vs previous state -, Unconditional gift (Gift exchange) -, "Percentage donations tied to purchases, especially in online auctions -", Give more tomorrow -, Give if you win -, "Size of ask; Low-ball, 'Legitimation of paltry donation' (LPD/LPC) -", Solicitor characteristics -, Visibility (of giver), Visibility - Recognition 'to influence others', Visibility - Recognition tiers, Reveal previous donor/donation (also 'info') -

(Sudhir ea, '16), (Falk, '07), (Elfenbein ea, '12), (Breman, '11), (Kellner ea, '17), (Fraser ea, '89), (Cialdini and S, '76), (Andrews ea, '08), (Gneezy ea, '17), (Landry ea, '05), (Meer, '11), (Harbaugh, '98), (Soetevent, '05), (Reinstein & R, '12), (Karlan & M '14), (Harbaugh, '98), (Karlan & M '14), (Harbaugh, '98), (Soetevent, '05) (Karlan & M '14), (Karlan & M '14)

## ​3.2.​ 3.2. De-biasing and misperception-correction

(Kogut & R, '05) (Caviola ea, '14)

## ​3.3.​ 3.3. innovative proposals

Smeets?, Kellner\_EA\_2017

## ​3.4.​ 3.4. EA-movement approaches and pitfalls

What has EA tried and how has it worked; evaluate approaches in light of the evidence. Is the movement too 'purist' (e.g., focusing on only the most effective, proven charities instead of those with broader potential appeal but less evidence)?

Charity science

Wiepking2012?

# ​4.​ Conclusion; a research agenda

Need for systematic platforms to study this, systematic experimentation and data sharing among effective/international charities. Platforms available, proposals for particular research projects and approaches.

* Who gives to the truly most effective international charities?
* Who is most likely to be convinced, and which arguments/presentations work in the SR and LR, and for whom (heterogeneity)?
  + Statistical learning-based analyses
* Practicable techniques in a range of higher-stakes real-world environments
* Replication (and verification), pooled evidence, meta-analysis
  + Context-sensitivity, large SE large samples, statistical learning controls, sharing data
  + Responses to 'obvious contrasts' seem to not reflect between-subject responses"

Also see gatesproposal.md (Gates foundation)

# ​5.​ Works Cited

[Oppenheimer, Daniel M., and Christopher Y. Olivola. 2011. *The Science of Giving: Experimental Approaches to the Study of Charity*. Psychology Press.](http://paperpile.com/b/lJEeEp/N59C)

# Checks and considerations for evaluating papers

* <http://spsp.org/sites/default/files/dialogue_26%282%29.pdf>
* Michèle Nuijten Tilburg University, NL Checking Robustness in 4 Steps
* ‘critiques’ in airtable

1. CF Burm: When we spend money on ourselves—on a weekend trip, a new coat, a dinner out—we typically attend to the value we are getting for our money. We weigh alternatives, read reviews, and ask our friends for advice. Yet when we instead donate our money or time to charities, value has a surprisingly minor impact on our decisions. Although Americans donate 2% of GDP to charity1 and volunteer for over 7 billion hours a year55, we devote relatively little time and money to determining which charities are effective before we donate13, 14. As a result, there is little correlation between a charity’s value and its popularity2-5, though charities vary widely in how effectively they use the money donated to them. Even direct manipulations of value often matter little to us: we will pay the same to save 2,000 as 200,000 birds from an oil spill, and do not donate more when matching grants will multiply the impact of our dollar39-40. Likewise, the emotions that motivate us to give are insensitive to impact and potential impact; warm glow tends to arise from the act of giving, not the outcome13, 17, and we often feel more empathy for one stranger in need than for many15, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Foreign aid budgets are often substantial in absolute terms (e.g., the UK pledge of 1% of GDP), but pale in comparison to domestic welfare spending. In spite of aid and private charity, billions around the world remain hungry, lacking medication, and in desperate poverty. International aid is also often targeted ininefficient ways [references]. Most of the arguments and discussion below also pertains to individual attitudes towards government-provided aid (ODA); however, we focus on charitable giving. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Burm: “Why are we motivated to give, but not motivated to give effectively?” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Innovationsinfundraising.org (12 Mar 2019) reports lists 44 papers on field experiments involving charitable giving. However, many of these are small-scale and many do not involve issues relevant to the effectiveness puzzle. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Furthermore, given the non-representative environments and experimental populations, existing findings tell us little about the relative importance of each factor, i.e., the magnitude of the impact on the amounts donated to effective causes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. S. (2010). ‘The credibility revolution in empirical economics: How better research design is taking the con out of econometrics’. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 24, 3–30. Nelson, L. D., Simmons, J. P., & Simonsohn, U. (2018). ‘Psychology’s renaissance’. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 17.1–17.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Although we provide some assesment of the relative *economic* importance of each factor, we mainly leave this for future work. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. In layman’s terms, Moral Utilitarians believe one should do ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’. If MUs do not give effectively, it is a puzzle, because they are not acting on their beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Non-MU donors may (e.g.) prioritise their own local community; this would explain their non-effective giving. However, they might (e.g.) be persuaded to expand their definition of their own 'community'. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Consider a typical non—super-rich individual. The amount this individual can donate to a typical cause (e.g., malaria protection in Africa, or general Cancer research) is tiny in comparison to the total donations/aid. “Diminishing marginal impact” is not likely to matter here; the charity that has the most impact for dollar will be the same for the first all of this individual donates as for the last. (The same may not hold for a Bill Gates.) This argument is made more formally by Sugden [ref]. However, some donors may derive a diminishing feeling of benefit for each cause they give to; e.g., if they have a particular Kantian ethic, a particular form of risk-aversion over impact, or are responding to cause-specific social pressure in a number of areas. (See models/conceptions in Reinstein 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. We do not pose the dichotomous question: “are people MU or not” (or deontologists or not). [Evidence here that moral motivations can be fluid and situational.] [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. *D Small -- “most of the previous research is considering a case without a comparison… single evaluation; they might go away”* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Existing ‘profiling’ research includes:

    * Money for Good [2010](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55723b6be4b05ed81f077108/t/566efb6cc647ad2b441e2c55/1450113900596/Money+for+Good+I.pdf)’s behavioral segmentation analysis
    * Money for Good [2015](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55723b6be4b05ed81f077108/t/56957ee6df40f330ae018b81/1452637938035/$FG+2015_Final+Report_01122016.pdf) contains additional segmentation analysis and tools, including discussion of “opportunities within specific demographic segments, such as Millennials and women.”
    * [US Trust study of High Net Worth Philanthropy](https://www.ustrust.com/publish/content/application/pdf/GWMOL/USTp_ARMCGDN7_oct_2017.pdf) provides a detailed look at the giving habits of this important demographic.
    * [Understanding Effective Givers](https://www.dropbox.com/s/9ywputy5v0qzu3t/Understanding%20Effective%20Givers.pdf?dl=0) examines inclination toward effective giving across demographic variables (discussed more [here](https://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/blog/id/1433/to-grow-a-healthy-movement-pick-low-hanging-fruit)).
    * [GiveWell’s 2016 Metrics Report](http://files.givewell.org/files/metrics/GiveWell_Metrics_Report_2016.pdf) suggests their audience differs significantly from the general population in terms of demographics and occupation
    * *Fitz/Kagan (slides* [*here*](http://www.academia.edu/35258430/Understanding_effective_givers_talk_)*),*

    [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. We refer to Utilitarian in its moral “greatest good for the greatest number” philosophical sense; this is not the “consistent maximization” Economics framework. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Relates to Geoffrey Miller’s “EA challenges 7: instinctive moral judgment don’t update very well”... mentions confirmation bias (Plous ‘93), status-quo bias (Kahneman ea ‘91), difficulty with moral uncertainty (MacAskill ‘14), ‘bad at Bayesian updateing, counterfactual reasoning, and steelmanning arguments’ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. “Bloom (2016) argued that ``empathy is a spotlight focusing on certain people in the here and now […] It is innumerate, favoring the one over the many …''” (-Bergh) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Geoffrey Miller: “EA challenges 1: Selfish genes vs. the expanding circle… Kin selection → family… Reciprocal altruism → friends… Sexual selection → mates … Group selection → tribe...Humans show parochialism: favor domestic charities over global charities than may be 100x more cost-effective”. This could be extended to the “distance” to “non-humans”; see Miller “EA challenges 9: Theory of Mind fails for non-humans” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. G Miller “EA challenges 4: Availability bias in utilitarian judgments”; he contrasts US rifle homicides to global malaria deaths, mentions news coverage [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. G Miller’s “EA challenges 3: Scope-insensitivity in utilitarian judgments”; notes Scope (‘number of beings affected, current and future’), Suffering, and Duration… Challenge 10 “Scope-insensitivity about long-term stakes” [In CBA I don’t consider the benefit correctly] [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Relates to Geoffrey Miller’s “EA challenges 7: instinctive moral judgment don’t update very well”... mentions confirmation bias (Plous ‘93), status-quo bias (Kahneman ea ‘91), difficulty with moral uncertainty (MacAskill ‘14), ‘bad at Bayesian updateing, counterfactual reasoning, and steelmanning arguments’ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)