[Link to Parallel Notes here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#heading=h.zf0eu3jghz5z)

[**​1.​ Presenting the puzzle and challenge: Our ineffective giving**](#_zf0eu3jghz5z) **3**

[​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.”](#_rh0pb0z7grmi) 3

[​1.2.​ Why (under which models) is this a puzzle?](#_9umnygowm5wt) 3

[​1.3.​ Overview of research Question/Problem: Why don’t people give in an evidence-based way?](#_hjqq5qb6um7l) 3

[​1.4.​ Previous literature reviews and surveys, lack of previous work](#_sksg7165wtc5) 4

[**​2.​ Explaining the puzzle: Barriers to EA giving and potential responses, evidence**](#_7xicvi7f1mlm) **5**

[​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]](#_6cmqzb8sj4rj) 5

[​2.2.​ Barriers considered (economic, psychological, systemic)](#_dto2wbbyjh26) 5

[​2.2.1.​ Conceptual classifications of barriers to EG](#_r5xbgpsugwg1) 5

[​2.2.2.​ Functional classification of barriers](#_i6olxcnv84ge) 6

[​2.3.​ Barrier: Awareness and consideration](#_h4e51xeo2wo0) 7

[​2.3.1.​ Distance - Spatial/Physical: parochial altruism/ingroup bias](#_lbkwiv86qb86) 7

[​2.3.2.​ Distance - Temporal (future problems and people)](#_lbkwiv86qb86) 7

[​2.3.3.​ Distance - Social/Cultural (interpersonal and identity e.g., race, gender, age, etc)](#_lbkwiv86qb86) 7

[​2.3.4.​ Distance - Hypothetical (probability to happen)](#_lbkwiv86qb86) 7

[​2.3.5.​ Distance - Emotional (Small’s paper)](#_3aoa7zalpofq) 7

[​2.3.6.​ Consistent problems aren’t in the news](#_tvem9kann1kd) 7

[​2.3.7.​ Social/geographic distance attenuates empathy (and other motivators), aka, parochialism](#_g4a8cteiztyr) 7

[​2.4.​ Barrier: Identity](#_yum4m6bndcnn) 7

[​2.4.1.​ Self-interest/local public good](#_v8p72fa9vqyv) 7

[​2.4.2.​ Cognitive dissonance [or is this ‘inertia’]](#_bnwm6qba5jcf) 7

[​2.4.3.​ Social perceptions and signaling empathy vs effectiveness](#_rjkmnyglsdvq) 7

[​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)](#_yjp3saekcslf) 7

[​2.5.​ Barrier: Inertia and systemic/institutional factors](#_cb2e7egwqaej) 8

[​2.5.1.​ Social norms](#_n0rz7enn7ev4) 8

[​2.5.2.​ Asks](#_n0rz7enn7ev4) 8

[​2.6.​ Barrier: Obstacles to doing evaluations](#_3b9th6ie5hck) 8

[​2.6.1.​ Market & Social Norms](#_fc121ahygpqw) 8

[​2.6.2.​ Taboo Trade-Offs (c.f., Protected Values)](#_fdqfic6i2sb5) 8

[​2.6.3.​ Cost effectiveness (analytical) information may turn off System-1 and reduce giving; statistics diminish impact of 'identifiable victim'](#_2183xrtjz5tr) 8

[​2.7.​ Barrier: Quantitative biases](#_81beqa7wlnqq) 9

[​2.7.1.​ Scope insensitivity](#_8ax2rgfz70of) 9

[​2.7.2.​ Proportional dominance effect/drop in bucket/psychosocial numbing](#_swmevynr64pd) 10

[​2.7.3.​ Biases in perceiving impact (or in perceiving the importance of impact)](#_ohxg172itkos) 10

[​2.7.4.​ Misunderstanding need](#_b4kagzwdfbj5) 10

[​2.7.5.​ Availability heuristic](#_b4kagzwdfbj5) 10

[​2.7.6.​ Number of deaths (they’re already dead)](#_b4kagzwdfbj5) 10

[​2.7.7.​ Statistical victim effect](#_b4kagzwdfbj5) 10

[​2.7.8.​ Overhead aversion](#_b4kagzwdfbj5) 10

[​2.7.9.​ Opportunity cost neglect](#_bx3upy312sen) 10

[​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”](#_aecc09t8zpn1) 10

[**​3.​ Tools for motivating EA giving**](#_w5nfs17mtd8k) **10**

[​3.1.​ Psych/behavioral tools; applicability to EA charities](#_hep7tkho7tn9) 10

[​3.2.​ 3.2. De-biasing and misperception-correction](#_qfnrd4b4zlv0) 11

[​3.3.​ 3.3. innovative proposals](#_gycqrz8ppbsq) 11

[​3.4.​ 3.4. EA-movement approaches and pitfalls](#_q19k6w41apd7) 11

[**​4.​ Conclusion; a research agenda**](#_r7z2ciqyynog) **11**

[**​5.​ Works Cited**](#_wzt2296me6h7) **11**

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

Reinstein, Fitz, Kagan (possible additional co-authors Jason Nemirow, Robin Bergh, others)

[Parallel notes/work found HERE](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YHaF4phpqthCEwwNdgd_QBZp5np0pHwHEJm3U2G1cxA/edit#heading=h.zf0eu3jghz5z)

# ​1.​ Presenting the puzzle and challenge: Our ineffective giving

Utilitarianism

→ Normative (why not?)

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

## ​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)]

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 defining 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.

## ​1.2.​ Why (under which models) is this 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?

## ​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 not when they give (why?).

What are the psychological motivations for not giving effectively?.

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

- Intention/Action

- 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#))

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

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/)

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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,[[1]](#footnote-0) 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)[[2]](#footnote-1)

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.​ Functional 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.

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[[3]](#footnote-2)

(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)[[4]](#footnote-3), misunderstanding marginality (e.g., marginal vs average, also relates to drop-in-the-bucket, which could also be system-I), scope-insensitivity,[[5]](#footnote-4) 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)[[6]](#footnote-5)

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

# ​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)

1. 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-0)
2. 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-1)
3. 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-2)
4. G Miller “EA challenges 4: Availability bias in utilitarian judgments”; he contrasts US rifle homicides to global malaria deaths, mentions news coverage [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. 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-4)
6. 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-5)