

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 32
Title of case study: Giving What We Can: the Fight Against Poverty in the Developing World
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Toby Ord is the founder of an international organisation called <i>Giving What We Can</i>. This organization is dedicated to the fight against poverty in the developing world. Its members pledge to give at least 10% of their income to aid and to direct their giving to the organisations that have a demonstrated ability to use their incomes most efficiently. The impetus for the founding of the organization was provided by Dr Ord's early work in ethics. He subsequently undertook additional research into how his ethical ideas could be put into practice. The fruits both of this research and of related research by other Oxford philosophers appear on the organisation's website, where, through a combination of pure and applied philosophy, the ethical case for making the pledge is urged. The arguments advanced have proved to be extremely persuasive: many people have been moved by them, and to great effect. The organisation has over 326 members, from seventeen countries, who together have pledged to give over US \$130,000,000 to charity.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>In his article 'How to be a Consequentialist About Everything', an early version of which was written in 2006, Dr Ord explored some issues about the fundamental nature and structure of consequentialism. This work convinced him that the most important objects of assessment, within a consequentialist framework, are not individual acts, but long-term commitments. He argued that, by prioritizing long-term commitments in this way, the consequentialist is able to bypass the somewhat arid preoccupation that consequentialists and other moral theorists have tended to have in the past with questions about which acts are impermissible, which merely permissible, which obligatory, and which supererogatory. Dr Ord also came to see that this in turn could have important practical repercussions. In particular, it helps us to see that a single long-term commitment to a cause not only avoids the burdens of continual one-off decision-making in pursuit of that cause, it is also more effective, since second-guessing about the effects of individual spending decisions is largely futile. It also gives us a better understanding than act-based consequentialism of what is wrong with <i>not</i> donating to charity: an act-based consequentialist will find it hard to single out any particular act of the non-donor as relevantly wrong.</p> <p>While exploring these general structural issues, Dr Ord also considered some more specific questions that would later bear directly on the founding of the organisation <i>Giving What We Can</i>. He discovered powerful and compelling new arguments why those of us who enjoy a certain basic quality of life should give a significant proportion of our income to poor people in developing countries. Some of these arguments addressed hitherto unexplored questions about the phenomenology of moral conflict; some took the form of counterarguments to the less demanding theories of Richard Miller and Liam Murphy. This led him to the idea of setting an achievable public standard of giving away 10% of one's income. Such a standard, which is anticipated in the old practice of tithing, is both less demanding and more intuitive than various others that a consequentialist might be expected to set, which in turn means that it is more likely to be followed. It is less demanding in the sense that it creates a fixed allowance within which to live, free of the guilt and self-censure that accompanies a life that is a constant and frequently unsuccessful struggle to avoid luxuries. It is more intuitive in the sense that it chimes better with our pre-theoretical convictions about how we should live.</p> <p>In 2009, during the early stages of his postdoctoral research fellowship, Dr Ord was inspired to carry out some of the more empirical research that would help him to convert his theoretical conclusions into something more practical. In the course of this research, he debunked various myths about aid, for example that it has no effect or is even counterproductive. He also came to acknowledge a significant moral imperative to donate to the most effective organisations, which led</p>

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him to investigate the cost-effectiveness of various interventions. In 2012, he wrote an article, 'The Moral Imperative Towards Cost-Effectiveness', in which he both argued for and clarified this imperative. He made comparisons between charities, and produced a list of charities that were particularly recommended for their cost-effectiveness. At around the same time, Andreas Mogensen provided additional relevant research in his article 'Giving Without Sacrifice?', in which he explored connections between income, happiness, and giving, and argued that giving to charity is not only of benefit to the recipients but also, in a variety of unexpected ways, to the donors. The upshot is a set of powerfully interlocking arguments, some conceptual, some empirical, some a mixture, which between them present a forceful case for making the pledge that is the defining characteristic of *Giving What We Can*.

From 2006, Dr Ord acted as a research associate both for the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics and for the Future of Humanity Institute. He has been a postdoctoral research fellow in the University of Oxford since 2009. Mr Mogensen has been a Fellow of All Souls College Oxford since 2010.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Dr Ord's personal website includes a link to 'How to be a Consequentialist About Everything', an early version of which he presented at the International Society for Utilitarian Studies in 2008: <http://www.amirrorclear.net/academic/papers/everything.pdf>. This article is also one of his outputs for the University's REF submission [REF2 – N01].

The results of Dr Ord's subsequent empirical research in connection with the organisation, his article 'The Moral Imperative Towards Cost-Effectiveness', and Mr Mogensen's article 'Giving Without Sacrifice?', all appear on the organisation's website, which was created in November 2009 when the organisation was founded:

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/>.

Of especial note are the pages 'Our Research', 'Myths About Aid', 'Recommended Charities', and 'Charity Comparisons' whose respective links are:

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/about-us/our-research>;

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/myths-about-aid.php>;

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/recommended-charities.php>;

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/charity-comparisons.php>.

The research has been widely acknowledged and is very well respected. A quotation from Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton, which appears on the page 'Our Research', bears witness to this: 'The research behind *Giving What We Can* is outstanding. By combining the most important empirical research with novel methodological insights about the ethics of aid, it is changing the way we think about aid effectiveness, and providing the basis for well-grounded advice on donating to fight global poverty.'

There is further evidence for the quality of the research in the support given to the organisation by the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, by Balliol College Oxford, and by the Future of Humanity Institute, each recorded on the website. This support has included not only administrative help of various kinds, but the hosting of many events—including events for the public or the media—in which the ideas behind the organisation are explained.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In November 2009 Dr Ord founded the organisation *Giving What We Can*. This organisation is dedicated to the fight against poverty in the developing world. Its members pledge to give at least 10% of their income to aid and to direct their giving to the organisations that have a demonstrated ability to use their incomes most efficiently. The most significant impact of his research is the amount of money pledged by the 326 members of this organisation: over US \$130,000,000. (One notable member is the philanthropist Dr Fred Mulder, who visited the organisation in 2013 and who was sufficiently impressed by the passion and energy of those working in it that he announced in a

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public lecture that very evening that he would donate £180,000 to the organisation, together with £80,000 over the next three years.) The money pledged has the potential to save lives. In fact, if we accept an estimate in *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries*, the amount pledged is enough to save nearly 57,000 lives^[i].

There is also a highly successful offshoot organisation called '80,000 hours', encouraging people to pursue careers that will enable them to become more effective altruists^[ii]. This was created by graduate and undergraduate students in Oxford, but now has active support throughout the world: its Director of Careers Research, its Career Impact Assessor, and the person developing its on-line social network are all working in American universities. Not long after these two organisations had been established, they—along with two others, *Effective Animal Activism* and *The Life You Can Save*—were united to constitute the Centre for Effective Altruism^[iii]. This Centre has been a registered charity since 2012 and is now supported by six full time team members, including staff and interns. *Giving What We Can* has itself now grown to the extent that it has chapters not only at Oxford but also at Cambridge, Princeton, Harvard, Rutgers, UC San Diego, Warwick, Canberra, Switzerland, and Birmingham: these are local branches of the organisation working in areas where there is a high density of people interested in working together to promote its goals^[iv].

Dr Ord provides ongoing advice on ethics and cost-effectiveness to Oxfam Great Britain, and consultation on cost-effective ways to fight disease to Oxford Analytica. He also wrote a chapter of a report for the Centre for Global Development, launched at the House of Lords in 2012, and has had talks with a special adviser to the Prime Minister, with the Secretary of State for International Development, and with the World Health Organisation^[v]. In April 2013, he participated in a working group of the World Health Organisation tasked with writing a handbook on ethical advice for setting up universal coverage health systems in developing countries: this handbook will include a special emphasis in the cost-effectiveness that he advocates. That same month he also met representatives of the World Bank to discuss the possibility of the World Bank's undertaking a major project to set global priorities^[vi]. Owen Barder, a senior fellow at the Centre for Global Development, said in an interview in 2012, 'One thing I have learned working in this industry is that there is a tendency to [promote]... all these different good causes... [Dr Ord is] partly pushing against that... and saying that we need to focus much more on the things that have the biggest impact... Thank you for all you're doing to help people in the developing world'^[vii].

In addition, Dr Ord's countless talks, presentations, and media performances have promoted the ideas behind *Giving What We Can* and encouraged reflection on these ideas^[viii]. They include the following, each of which has reached out to an audience consisting at least partly of non-academics:

- participation in a conference in Tanzania in June 2009 on the ethics of priority setting in global health;
- a talk entitled 'Choosing a Cause: The Differences and Similarities Between Fighting Climate Change and Fighting Global Poverty' in the University of Oxford Climate Change Week in December 2009;
- a talk entitled 'The True Value of Time and Money' to a Royal College of Art special seminar series on time and money in February 2011;
- a talk entitled 'Taking Charity Seriously' to BarCamp Nonprofit in Oxford in November 2010;
- a talk entitled 'How to Have Ten Thousand Times the Impact: The Pivotal Importance of Cost-Effectiveness in Delivering Aid' to Oxfam Great Britain in Oxford in March 2011;
- a contribution to a conference entitled *Valuing Lives* at New York City in March 2011, advocating the Quality Adjusted Life Year method of priority setting for charities;
- a talk entitled 'Taking Charity Seriously' to Barclay's Bank in Cheshire in May 2011;
- participation in a conference in Seattle for philosophers and economists to advise the Global Burden of Disease report, produced by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, on how to measure the badness of disease and disability;
- participation in a workshop entitled *Issues in Priority Setting for Health* in Surajkund in February-March 2012, discussing whether and how to use discount rates in global health

priority setting, and including a presentation on what information needs to be included in the new (third) edition of *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries*, the world's major analysis of which health opportunities are most important (this was supplemented in April 2013 by a contribution to a conference of the Disease Control Priorities Project for the same purpose);

- a presentation at 'Intelligence Squared' in April 2013;
- opposition to the motion 'This House would support Britain before Burundi' at the Oxford Union in April 2013 (the motion was defeated by 270 votes to 70).

Dr Ord has also been interviewed on the ideas behind *Giving What We Can* by (among others) *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Financial Times*, *The Tablet*, *The Australian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Scotsman*, *The Herald Sun*, *The News Statesman*, BBC (both television and radio, including an interview for 'The Moral Maze' and an interview for 'Breakfast')^[ix], American Public Media, NBC, The World, Talk Sport, Fox News, and Sky News, all of which has drawn his ideas to the attention of the general public. One particularly high-profile endorsement of the organisation has been that of Professor Peter Singer in a talk at the Technology, Entertainment, and Design conference in Long Beach California in March 2013: this talk has been viewed over 320,000 times (there is a link to it on the front page of the organisation's website). In 2011 Dr Ord was included in an *Independent on Sunday* list of the top one hundred 'outstanding examples of people who volunteer, care, educate, or do something special to make Britain a more contented, better-adjusted, and supportive place'^[x].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[i] *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries* is published by OUP (2nd edn, 2006). The estimate used to calculate the number of lives that can be saved occurs on p. 299.

[ii] The website for the offshoot organisation '80,000 hours' is:

<http://80000hours.org/>.

[iii] The website for the parent charity The Centre for Effective Altruism is:

<http://home.centreforeffectivealtruism.org/>.

[iv] There are links to the different chapters of *Giving What We Can* on the following page of the website:

<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/getting-involved/local-chapters.php>.

[v] The report for the Centre for Global Development can be found at:

<http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1426240/>, and the abstract for the moral case outlined in the report can be found at:

http://www.cgdev.org/doc/full_text/priority_setting/1426241.html

[vi] Further details of Dr Ord's work with WHO and the World Bank can be found at:

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=695a077010b33dc140654bf3c&id=0f3c0cce5c&e=6e311f9ab9#Toby>.

[vii] The interview with Owen Barder can be found at: <http://developmentdrums.org/484/>.

[viii] Further details of all the media presentations can be found at:

<http://givingwhatwecan.org/about-us/media-coverage>

Of especial note are:

[ix] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11950843>, which was the most popular story for the day on the BBC website;

[x] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/the-iiosi-happy-list-2011--the-100-2280696.html>, which was in relation to Dr Ord's having been selected for *The Independent's* 'Happy List: One Hundred People Who Make Britain a Better and Happier Place to Live'.