William MacAskill. *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Help Others, Do Work that Matters, and Make Smarter Choices About Giving Back*. Avery 2016. 272 pp. $17.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781592409662).

Will MacAskill's *Doing Good Better* provides an introduction to the Effective Altruism movement, and, in the process, it makes a strong case for its importance. The book is aimed at a general audience. It is fairly short and written for the most part in a light, conversational tone. *Doing Good Better*'s only real rival as a treatment of Effective Altruism is Peter Singer's *The Most Good You Can Do*, though MacAskill's and Singer's books are better seen as companion pieces than rivals. Like *The Most Good You Can Do, Doing Good Better* offers the reader much of philosophical interest, and it delivers novel perspectives and even some counterintuitive but well-reasoned conclusions that will likely provoke both critics and defenders of Effective Altruism for some time to come.

Before diving into *Doing Good Better* we want to take a moment to characterize Effective Altruism. Crudely put, Effective Altruists are committed to three claims. First, they maintain that we have strong reason to help others. Second, they claim that these reasons are impartial in nature. And, third, they hold that we are required to act on these reasons in the most effective manner possible. Hence, according to Effective Altruists, those of us who are fortunate enough to have the leisure to write (or read) scholarly book reviews (1) should help those who are most in need, (2) should do so even if we lack any personal connection to them, and (3) should do so as efficiently as we can. Effective Altruists do not go so far as to claim that these are our only reasons for actions, and they do not deny we also have reasons, for instance, to care for those who are near and dear to us and to pursue our own personal projects. Effective Altruism is not a comprehensive moral theory, though it has rather a lot to say about our moral lives.

Doing Good Better is divided into three sections. The first of these is the shortest, and it asks two questions: Why should we care about effectiveness, and why should we think that we are in a position to help others? MacAskill's answer to the first question takes the form of series of anecdotes about well-intentioned but cringe-inducing attempts at altruism that cost millions of dollars but actually reduced the wellbeing of the would-be beneficiaries. His answer to the second question is to point out that if you earn more than $52,000 per year than you are part of the 'global 1%,' i.e., you earn more than 99% of your fellow humans. The implication, of course, is that as part of the global 1% you are obligated to help others. Many will resist this implication though, and those who are on the firmest ground, it seems, are likely to point to considerations of fairness here. Why should someone who is earning, say, about what an assistant professor of philosophy makes be under any obligation to reduce her seemingly low disposable income while many people around her who make far more money don't do anything to help those who are most in need? University undergraduates are likely to raise similar questions with even more force. Concerns about fairness receive fairly short shrift in *Doing Good Better*, though nothing we can see prevents Effective Altruists from trying to address this matter more directly elsewhere.

The second main section of *Doing Good Better* works through some of the more interesting questions that confront someone who finds the Effective Altruism movement attractive. Of course, we can discuss only a few questions in a short review like this. One of the questions is by what metric are we to determine how to do good better? MacAskill, like many Effective Altruists, opts cautiously for QALYs (quality adjusted life years); as a first approximation, we do good better by providing more total QALYs through our actions. But MacAskill acknowledges what everyone who has worked with QALYs knows: they're better than nothing but problematic enough to require a better

alternative since they are imprecise and continue to generate disagreement about how to weigh the effects of various diseases for one's welfare. But this much is clear enough: on any reasonable metric the most cost-effective way to help humans alive today is to direct our efforts toward people in low-income countries. The cost-effectiveness of preventing malaria (through cheap insecticide-treated mosquito nets) or curing schistosomiasis (through inexpensive drugs such as praziquantel or oxamniquine) in low-income countries is many orders of magnitude more effective than anything one can do in high-income countries.

If Effective Altruists are right about whom to help, then how should we help them? Here MacAskill's well-known ambivalence about many charitable organizations comes to the surface. First, MacAskill argues (correctly in our view) that only with the rise of the Effective Altruism movement over the last decade has cost-benefit analysis been used with sufficient rigor to evaluate the work done by these charities. The question we should be asking, MacAskill contends, is: How much good will the next dollar given to this charity do? There is good sense in this, but we can't help but worry that being so mercenary about giving might ultimately lead us to give less. In part, we give charitably out of habit, and in part because we have made some connection with those who will benefit. We have no knockdown argument that shifting our patterns of giving with changes in marginal value will reduce our giving over the course of a life, but we think Effective Altruists ought to try to address our worries. Second, MacAskill is skeptical about encouraging people to work for charitable organizations, pointing out, as many Effective Altruists do, that many of us can do more good by seeking a high-income profession and 'earning to give' or, in some cases, by going into policy or politics in order to make governments more altruistic. Much ink has been spilled on this subject, and we doubt that either MacAskill or his critics have had the final word on the matter yet. Ultimately, it is an empirical question whether Effective Altruists who follow the path of—for example, earning to give—drift away from their altruistic values.

The final third of the book explores some of the unexpected turns that Effective Altruism has recently made. One of these turns concerns non-human animals. Just as it is far more cost-effective to help humans living in low-income countries than humans living in high-income countries, so too there is a case to be made that it is more cost-effective to help non-human animals than human animals. Even tiny changes made in the way that the US meat industry treats the billions of animals it raises and slaughters every year can increase the welfare of many creatures. This fact raises numerous difficult questions, but perhaps the most important of these is how we should compare human and non-human wellbeing. We have already seen MacAskill relying on a somewhat suspect metric when comparing benefits to humans, but trying to find a metric broad enough to allow meaningful comparisons across species raises further doubts. If we don't have a proper metric for this purpose, then how do we know whether we're doing good better when we shift our resources away from, on the one hand, supplementing the diets of children in low-income countries with vitamin A to help prevent blindness toward, on the other hand, funding online efforts to persuade people in high-income countries to eat less meat? Of course, MacAskill's book is not an attempt to answer this question, but we think Effective Altruists would be well advised to work on such an answer.

A second unexpected turn concerns the many tens and hundreds of billions of humans who do not yet exist but will do so. They will do so, that is, *if* we prevent our own extinction. The most obvious threat at the moment is global climate change, but there are many others such as the potential development of hostile AI or the possibility of the earth being hit by a large asteroid. This raises the real—though deeply disturbing—prospect that we ought to allow terrible suffering on the part of the world's most vulnerable people now in order to reduce slightly the likelihood that a rogue piece of rock will annihilate humanity in the next hundred years and thereby prevent millennia upon millennia

of future human flourishing. Critics of Effective Altruism will be inclined to argue that we have no special obligations to those who are alive today, and it is hard not to feel the pull of this conclusion. Nevertheless, there is some reason to resist this pull. It is easy for us to visualize the appalling suffering of those who live below the global extreme poverty line of $1.90/day, but it is almost impossible to imagine wellbeing of hundreds of generations of our species. Effective Altruists are right to warn us that their critics might be suffering from a failure of imagination.

Leonard Kahn, Loyola University
Emily Ortiz, Loyola University