ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced mutual aid to mainstream society; whether giving to GoFundMe campaigns or helping neighbors get groceries and PPE, it became a more common practice to many who previously had little experience with mutual aid. However, mutual aid is by no means a new practice and has been a crucial tool for survival among marginalized groups when the state or aid programs fail to meet their needs.

Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, wrote a paper in 1972 called "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" that had a lasting impact on the way that we think about giving to charities and NGO aid projects. His writings helped to create a branch of practical ethics called effective altruism. The goal of effective altruists is to save the most lives per dollar amount possible. Using a maximum efficiency model, effective altruists select causes based on how successfully they can yield results. However, this means that some causes are ignored because they are too expensive or hard to show a return on investment. Singer also encourages people to get higher-income jobs so that they can be paid more and donate more money to 'effective' organizations. Singer cites Bill and Melinda Gates as some of the best effective altruists in the world.

However, these organizations cause systemic harm within their own structures, in the communities they engage with, and in their general approach to the problem of material need. I argue that the actual and potential harm these organizations and the effective altruist mindset pose are more harmful than can be reliably outweighed by their benefits. I show how we should be cautious to endorse these kinds of organizations and be open to considering alternative methods of meeting immediate needs.

I discuss mutual aid as an alternative to effective altruist organizations because it, by nature, does not pose the same potential harms that effective altruism does. Beyond that, it creates more support networks for the future and builds solidarity among communities, organizing and mobilizing individuals to change or disengage with the structures that often create the material need that mutual aid addresses and amplify the challenges that marginalized groups face. The non-hierarchical structure at the heart of mutual aid emphasizes every individual's importance in decision making and their potential to contribute to their community. I argue that, morally, we ought to devote more resources to mutual aid.

Should Solidarity Replace Charity?:
Critiquing Effective Altruism and Considering Mutual Aid as an Alternative

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Spring 2022

Acknowledgments

There are many people whom I wish to thank for their contributions to and support of this project.

First and foremost, thank you to my thesis advisor, Nina Emery, for learning with me and making sure I stay on track. Without your guidance and encouragement, this project would not exist. Thank you for reminding me to be charitable and to keep my eye on what's important. I am immensely grateful for your mentorship. Thank you to James Harold for encouraging this idea in the first place, being a reader for this thesis, and for being a phenomenal advisor throughout my time at Mount Holyoke. Thank you to Anna Daily for providing me with so many sources in this project and being a reader for this thesis. Thank you to Ali Aslam for discussing our connected projects and being one of the first mentors on this thesis. Your classes and our conversations gave me the foundation for this project.

Thank you, Natalie, for being my sounding board and showing me infinite love and patience (also for being an incredible editor, brilliant conversationalist, and shining light in my life). I love you, and I'm more grateful for you every day. Thank you, Aviva, for reading this and giving me your thoughtful feedback. Thank you to all of my friends (too many to name, but you know who you are) who fed me, stayed up late with me, supported me, kept me honest, and made my life sweeter after sleepless nights. I appreciate and love you more than you could know. Thank you, Mom, for making all of this possible. I love you.

I'd like to extend a final thank you to the Mount Holyoke community for teaching me firsthand about solidarity and community. Thank you to the scholars who informed this work, the people who have engaged in community care for as long as we can remember, and to everyone who uplifts and supports others with promiscuous care and an eye on the future.

Should Solidarity Replace Charity?: Critiquing Effective Altruism and Considering Mutual Aid as an Alternative

Table of Contents:

1. **Introduction**

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans were struck by the inaction and unpreparedness of the government in the face of the virus. However, people banded together, creating GoFundMe campaigns for medical bills and funeral expenses. Neighbors collected groceries, shared PPE and emergency resources, and tried to support one another in a time of horrible anxiety and uncertainty. Eventually, the nation adapted to our changing needs, sending stimulus checks, freezing rent payments, and helping spread knowledge about the virus. Before the government was able to have more control over the situation, though, individuals were able to meet their community members' needs. At the same time, we saw police brutality come further into public focus and the following community support in the form of bail funds, sharing protest supplies, and funding legal aid. America was focused on this practice of *mutual aid*, helping community members meet their needs in a network of support.[1] This focus on mutual aid made one thing very clear: many people felt that it was their duty to help their community members. They reflected more on how they could share and what they could do to help their neighbors; it was recognized that we were all in a vulnerable position, and we would be stronger together.

In this thesis, I will argue that using mutual aid is a preferable mode of community support to charity because it avoids some of the concerning risks and costs that charities tend to pose. In particular, I will compare mutual aid to effective altruism, a form of charity that I will define shortly. Charity (as a general practice) is a longstanding, widespread institution that aims to redistribute funds and resources to help vulnerable populations. I will be discussing some of the literature regarding the ethics attached to giving to charities and aid NGOs. I will specifically discuss the practice of *effective altruism*. I will explain how effective altruism came to exist, the

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[1] I will be providing a more thorough definition of mutual aid in Section 5.

arguments that support it, and the effects it has on our understanding of charity and giving. Then I will outline my main critique of effective altruism and consequently explore possible objections to my view and corresponding responses. Then, I will discuss mutual aid as a different practice that avoids causing much of the harm that effective altruism does. Mutual aid is also a support network that connects community members to share resources and time, and it has been an especially important resource when governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and charities do not provide the resources a community needs. It is importantly different from charity in a few ways, including its lower risks for systemic harm, epistemic ignorance, employment of incommensurate values, and its deeper commitment to our collective vision of the future. I hope to convince my reader we cannot be certain that the benefits of effective altruism outweigh its potential costs, and we as a society should invest as equally (if not more) in mutual aid as we do in "effective" charities.

2.   Effective Altruism

Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" is a standard introduction to thinking about our commitments to one another as members of a global community and just how far we have to go to meet them. I will discuss his arguments more in Section 2.1., showing how they can be used to support the effective altruist argument, which I will outline below. His directive in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" is that we ought to give as much as we can to charity to help those who are suffering from a lack of material resources. If we can help them without a morally comparable sacrifice on our part, we have a duty to do so (Singer 1972, 231).

So, if we have to give what we can to others, how should we do it? Singer recommends charities as a helpful intermediary between donor and recipient, but identifies a different question: how much should we give? Giving away as much of your wealth as possible is a big demand, so what would it look like if this directive was realistically implemented? Singer answers this question in his book *The Most Good You Can Do* (2015). The book, aimed at a more popular audience than most of his works, leads the reader to the practice of *effective altruism*, including some of its patron saints and paradigm cases of "good" giving. While Singer doesn't define it in the book, my definition of *effective altruism* is the practice of searching out and donating to specific organizations that will do the most good to alleviate global suffering while using the money as efficiently as possible; it also includes shaping your life to earn the maximum amount of money you can so that you are able to donate it. The goal of effective altruism is to save the most QALYs possible per dollar. QALY is an acronym for 'quality-adjusted life year' and is one of the measurements that effective altruists use to measure the effectiveness of their work. I will explain more why this is a preferred unit of measurement for effective altruists in the explanation of the second premise of the following argument.

Below is a reconstruction of Singer's argument to persuade readers to participate in *effective altruism* (hereby referred to as EA):

Premise 1. We ought to do as much good as we can.

Premise 2. The way to do as much good as we can is by earning as much money as we can and then giving that money to whatever charity is able to save the most QALYS per dollar.

Conclusion. We ought to earn as much money as we can and give our earnings to whatever charity is able to save the most QALYS per dollar. (P1, P2)

2.1.   The Duty to Give: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

The following section aims to explain the reasoning behind the first premise of the argument above. By explaining why Singer and other effective altruists believe we should try to do as much good as we can, I hope to show how they reach the points in the second premise of EA.

Reflecting on conditions of famine and global poverty in 1972, Peter Singer considers what we as able contributors can do to help in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." Singer argues that those who live comfortably are morally obligated to donate some of their earnings to support people suffering from preventable lack of necessities (1972, 238). He says that, because government spending on aid is so little, it becomes an individual responsibility to support people in need (230). Importantly, he emphasizes that we shouldn't be partial to people in need who are geographically close to us; our responsibilities are just as strong regardless of where the recipient of aid is.

Singer bases the paper on "the assumption that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad," and consequently declares that "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it" (1972, 231). He goes on to say that most people have enough money to address this suffering in some way and that giving some of it away would be no larger a sacrifice than getting rid of a pair of shoes. Not only that, but he says we have the responsibility to give until we are in a comparable place of poverty to those we are trying to help (although this commitment is less demanding in his later writings) (241). This standard has been used as a paradigmatic example for class discussion about what our responsibilities to one another are and how demanding they may seem. For example, if someone is donating a certain amount of money per week to mitigate hunger, they should not give to the point where they cannot afford their groceries. But, they should give *almost* that much—it should be as much as one can afford to give. He demonstrates the urgency of our commitment by likening the conditions of those suffering from global poverty to a child drowning in a pond in front of you; obviously, you have the obligation to save the child, especially considering that saving them will come at almost no cost to yourself.[2] Singer suggests we focus our giving efforts on charity organizations, identifying them as the most helpful and reliable source of aid to those in need (232).

I have reconstructed Singer's argument in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (referred to after this point as FAM) in the following way:

Premise 1. We have the means to help people who are suffering due to a lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without a significant moral sacrifice on our part.

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[2] This example will be more relevant in section 3.2.2.

Premise 2. If it is in our power to help those who are suffering due to lack of food, shelter, and medical care, and it does not require a morally significant sacrifice on our part, we ought morally to do it.

Conclusion. We ought to help people who are suffering due to a lack of food, shelter, and medical care. (P1, P2)

Because FAM presents such a strong commitment, it follows that if we *must* give as much as we can without significant sacrifice, then we should make sure we're spending it well. The assumption underlying this claim is that, if we have to do good, we have the responsibility to help as much as we're able to. By strategically making as much money as possible, one can give it away to create maximally beneficial results. It's important to note that the word "*good*" here is roughly equated to being able to save the most lives as you possibly can with a finite amount of money. Some charities and aid organizations show that they can produce significant results with specific amounts of money. By comparing the money given with the results produced by their work, one can identify more and less "effective" charities. This is how we get the "effective" in being an *effective altruist*.

By applying a mindset of maximization to aid, Singer and effective altruists employ an intense *utilitarian* mindset. Utilitarians choose their actions to create the outcome that they believe will have the most total "good" out of all possible outcomes. By quantifying living conditions, money donated, and aid delivered, effective altruists can show how much good they're doing annually.

I want to make it clear that I agree with the conclusion of FAM. I think that it is a strong appeal to action, but, overall, a reasonable one. I disagree with EA and the mechanics and effects of the actual practice of effective altruism. I want to show that we do indeed have the duty to

give, but that we should be less confident that effective altruism is the right way to fulfill that duty.

Hopefully, this section has shown why effective altruists believe the first premise of EA ("It is our duty to do as much good as we can"). Our duty to act is made clear by "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," and of course, more good is better than less from a utilitarian viewpoint. Next, I'd like to explain the reasoning behind the second premise of EA by showing how having a higher income and choosing organizations to donate to based on their ability to maximize QALYs can support a view of doing "as much good" as one can.

2.2. Why Be an Effective Altruist?: Cooperation and Donation

Singer's writings create a larger picture of how we ought to share our wealth and the human motivations behind cooperation and giving. His messages change with time and are dependent upon his intended audience, but I want to analyze these texts regarding how they support FAM and EA and their compatibility with one another.

Singer explains in his 1993 book *How Are We to Live?* that we need to understand altruism and ethics and how they can shape our lives to lead 'good' ones. Singer says, in the system of capitalism where the norm is to be selfish, being selfless or helping others can pose a significant risk to one's well-being. In many situations, he concludes, cooperation is the best option for your well-being (and the well-being of others). It is in our best interest to act ethically and not purely out of self-interest.

He acknowledges the difficulty in finding a balance in centering our interests in our lives and devoting time and energy to other people. It takes on a broader question of how "[w]e have to decide to what extent we shall live for ourselves, and to what extent for others" (1993, 7). He

identifies the fall of the Soviet Union as a paradigmatic example of the futility of trying to bridge the gap between serving self-interest and a non-capitalist economy (15). He makes it sound like, as much as achieving this goal would have been desirable, it could never have worked. However, he believes there are ways to integrate ethics into our lives (and our involvement in the economy), even though 'ethics' are sometimes thought of as being somewhat contradictory to our self-interest. Not only are there ways to make it work, but Singer says that a politics of ethics could "deal with the root causes of poverty, crime, and the short-term destruction of our planet's resources. A politics based on ethics could be radical, in the original sense of the term: that is, it could change things from the roots" (21).

In 1999, Singer returned to the question of cooperation in his book *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation.* He writes that the political Left is too idealistic in their ideas about altruism, and that they would be better able to accomplish their goals if they realized how our evolutionary features are compatible with helping others. Singer begins the book by comparing Mikhail Bakunin's writings about anarchism and Karl Marx's on communism; he agrees with Bakunin's statement that communism is against human nature. But he acknowledges the recognition of suffering and the urge to do something to stop it (1999, 8). He reiterates his position as a utilitarian aimed at minimizing suffering, a goal aligned with leftism: "If we shrug our shoulders at the avoidable suffering of the weak and the poor, of those who are getting exploited and ripped off, or who simply do not have enough to sustain life at a decent level, we are not of the left" (1999, 8).

The arguments put forth in these two books appear very compatible with one another. However, they seem to align less with the final stance of EA that he seems to settle on later in his writings. Whether or not this is a knowing shift on Singer's part is unclear. The maximization

mindset seems counterintuitive to his point in *A Darwinian Left* that we should try to make giving as aligned with self-interest and a stronger community as possible. Also, he identifies capitalism as a source of individualism and greed that disincentivizes cooperation; however, most charities and aid NGOs function with capitalist models. He also later encourages people to become CEOs of corporations and major companies to increase their income. Unless he does not recognize the contradictions of these statements, he seems to change his view quite drastically.

In 2015, Singer revised his recommendations in his book *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically.* This book, aimed at a more public audience than his other publications, tells readers that being an effective altruist is the best way to live ethically because it maximizes the number of people you can help with the money you give. Returning to the statement in *A Darwinian Left* that capitalism breeds egoism, Singer positions effective altruism as a solution, writing "altruism is contrasted with egoism, which is concern only for oneself, but we should not think of effective altruism as requiring self-sacrifice, in the sense of something necessarily contrary to one's own interests" (2015, 17). He says that the difference between an egoist or altruist makes little difference when you are helping people (112). The incentive to the altruist is, on face value, goodness, but they also get to live the life of a CEO, donating money when they can and otherwise enjoying all of the privileges of the wealthy, creating a strong incentive to live this kind of lifestyle. To people who are unable to attend college or get a position like this, there is no suggestion of how to 'do good.' We will see in the next section how his ideas relate to international aid, and why effective altruists think their help is more needed and more helpful in other countries.

2.3.   Why Be an Effective Altruist?: International Aid and Globalization

I would like to talk more about the definition of an "effective" organization as it is relevant to supporting P2 of EA and why I am including NGOs in my criticisms. An important facet of effective altruism is that it does more 'good' in poorer countries because it's possible to ensure more QALYs per dollar. That is largely made possible by globalization; through the instant connections of the internet and the establishment of international humanitarian aid organizations, we can send money to another country to further a specific cause. Because of the lower relative costs of medical care, food, and other necessities in low- and middle-income countries, the donor's dollar can do more "good." I would like to explore further the focus effective altruists place on helping international communities before discussing it in Section 3.

In his essay "Bystanders to Poverty," Singer explains the urgency of taking action against global poverty and lack of resources. By targeting Johnathan Glover's *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, he points out the lack of attention to global large-scale death caused by poverty. He says that the general lack of attention and action against this problem is just as morally abhorrent as being a passive bystander to genocide. Singer locates the problem as a too-distinct separation between acts and omissions (2010, 186). By identifying the violence of poverty as a threat on par with interpersonal violence, it reinforces the moral duty to act.

In the essay, Singer discusses international aid, especially in reference to the period directly following the Cold War, and says that aid was only given as political leverage. He writes:

> It seems that, without Cold War politics to spur giving aid for geopolitical purposes, the motivation for giving aid was not strong enough to maintain the Cold War levels. This was not because aid had been shown to be ineffective. On the contrary, a study prepared for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development noted the irony of the fact

that official aid was "experiencing a steady decline even as conditions are improving for

its greater effectiveness." (2010, 187-188)

This statement seems to criticize some of the underlying motivations behind charities; perhaps

because of the political nature of the problem, Singer turns to NGOs. Having established that

there is no significant difference between ignoring global poverty and ignoring a violent

genocide, he says that protests and donations are no real sacrifice of time, safety, or resources, so

there's no reason not to take action (191).

Singer also notes an intuitive (but, on my view, irrelevant) difference between violent

genocide and genocide by poverty:

One argument for giving priority to stopping genocide might be that those committing

genocide are doing something morally very wrong. When we stop them, therefore, we not

only save the lives of innocents, but we also stop a moral evil. When we prevent deaths

from poverty related diseases, we 'only' save the lives of innocents. Hence, we have an

extra reason to stop the deaths from genocide that we do not have in the case of

preventing deaths by disease. (195)

I believe this is a failure to recognize the "moral evil" of neoimperialism and capitalist

exploitation that causes global poverty and famine. However, this will be discussed in the next

section regarding globalization and systematic injustice.

The effects of globalization have undeniably changed international relations, economies,

and cultural exchange; whether or not these effects have been net positive is debatable.

According to Singer, globalization is a complicated mechanism that poses a lot of moral

challenges and a lot of advantages, which he discusses in *One World: The Ethics of

Globalisation*. Singer thinks that globalization will help us create a more equitable world and

save lives that are ended by poverty and national loyalties; he believes that, while there are some significant disadvantages and problematic aspects of globalization, it has many positive effects on the global environment, economy, legal code, and moral norms.

He discusses international responsibility, saying that it is important to consider (regarding climate change) how many resources a nation is currently using *as well as* how many they used in the past (2002, 40). He says that this is politically advantageous to all nations, including those that have used the most resources; by not being accountable, they open risk to national security by inviting foreign hostility (18). He says that the governments' main incentives are capital, not the well-being of their citizens (59), but that the book is not a critique of capitalism (69). Regarding systemic inequity, he writes that "reducing poverty and injustice will not be enough to end violence" (126). He talks about the United Nations' global jurisdiction, and how it is an example of a positive effect of globalization.

Singer says that there are certainly limits to what the global community can do to protect citizens in other countries, but that we are all essentially global citizens. This returns to his points in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" that we have an equal responsibility to people no matter their location. He writes: "A truly global ethic would not stop at or give any great significance to state boundaries. State sovereignty has no *intrinsic* moral weight" (172). Therefore, we are not bound to the rule of countries and should treat everyone as our fellow citizens. This will help combat our geographical bias in favor of those who live close to us or within our communities. He admits that "to suppress these partial affections would destroy something of great value and therefore cannot be justified from an impartial perspective," but it seems that this is somewhat mitigated by viewing everyone as fellow citizens and that duty should extend beyond our families (187). He points out that nationalism encourages us to ignore extreme poverty,

especially citizens of affluent nations, but that NGOs work and make a significant difference in saving lives (217).

There is a divide between the logic at work in *A Darwinian Left* and *The Most Good You Can Do*. Somewhere in between, he seems to change his mind about the costs of egoism, capitalism, and changing the "payoffs" of altruism. I am uncertain why this change occurs, but I believe it's a significant one. It shows the line at which I begin to disagree with Singer's arguments. I agree with the call to action in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," and I think it's compatible with a moral lifestyle if applied in a certain way. I disagree with EA, and I don't think effective altruism is a particularly morally good course of action. So, I agree with Singer's writings that endorse his ideas in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," and I would like to critique his later writings that support EA. Despite the last few sections explaining why an effective altruist might believe EA is an extension of FAM, I hope to show in the following section my critique of EA. However, I think that my critiques and my proposed alternative are still compatible with FAM.

I would extend Singer's critique of Johnathan Glover to his endorsement of globalization and capitalism that seems inherent in EA. I believe that, as Singer connects Glover's argument to global poverty, his neglect to recognize the same pattern due to globalization is a mistake that leads to systemic harm in the practice of effective altruism. In the following sections, we will see how effective altruism perpetuates harm and stagnates change in the international community. This exacerbates systemic injustices and creates barriers to evolving global systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and accessible. We will also consider possible responses from the perspectives of effective altruists, and I will explain why I do not find them convincing.

3.   **Critiques of Effective Altruism**

My primary critique of effective altruism is its perpetuation and exacerbation of systemic harms. While effective altruism does secure more QALYs by purchasing resources, it also reinforces the cycles that create material need and destabilize institutions that would otherwise provide more locally-informed and sustainable aid. This section will discuss the effects of charity, the phenomenon of "philanthrocapitalism," and how charities and aid NGOs can serve as a barrier to creating systemic change. This section outlines my rejection of P2 of EA.

3.1. **Systemic Harms**

The attitude towards giving that Singer promotes has set a troubling precedent for conversations around donating money. He talks very little in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" about the agency of those who would be recipients, what they have to offer, and how they can weigh in on their own aid. It is instead focused on how giving money should be considered a duty, not an act of charity (235). He goes on to say there are no acts of charity in giving global aid, but that donors are only fulfilling our responsibility. But, it seems surprising that it is our responsibility to help support other people, yet never interact with them. This seems counterintuitive considering the intrinsic nature of providing care for people, in that it includes creating a thoughtful relationship, even if not a close one. Singer would say that while these feelings are natural, they are misleading and create a bias toward caring more for a specific person or group, rather than being objectively fair in your giving efforts.

Additionally, Singer fails to recognize the harms that charities and NGOs enact on the communities they aim to help when recommending charities to which one could donate. These sorts of organizations are made to be (at least somewhat) dependent upon whoever provides their

funding. For example, if an organization like UNICEF requires money from its constituent countries, the funding can be revoked at any time if the organization's goals don't align with the funders' agenda. However, this lack of funding means a corresponding lack of resources being provided by UNICEF. These organizations are often run by "experts" from other countries (often affluent nations/former empires) that have no lived experience in the problems they're trying to solve and little connection with the demographic they're trying to help (Spade 2020, 16). Relatedly, many of these groups involve some exclusive standards for receiving aid, trying to determine who in the demographic and cause they serve are really deserving of their time and resources; this often excludes those who might be unhoused, struggling with addiction, have a criminal record, or don't meet the set standards in other ways. This simultaneously feeds into the pattern of the savior complex: the insidious idea that only you can provide the solutions to their problems and that the people you're helping are helpless and incapable of finding solutions.

3.1.1.   Efficacy of Charity

Andrew Kuper criticizes Singer's suggestions (but, like me, seems more focused on the agenda of effective altruists in general), calling them "*acontextual*" (2002, 110). He says that effective altruists offer too simple a solution: "All-too-quick recommendations are not just a leap from principle to action, they are symptomatic of an implicitly apolitical outlook that does not take the real demands of contextual judgment seriously" (2002, 113). Because he is specifically talking about "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Kuper is concerned about Singer's recommendations to the average middle-upper class citizen in wealthy countries. He points out the Calvinist effect that the original FAM argument has (113); you can never be doing enough until you place yourself in a position where you are one bad day away from needing aid yourself.

However, it seems that his critiques of Singer are more focused on the sort of practical effects brought on by effective altruism. His problem isn't with giving itself, but the politically neglectful outlook that EA seems to promote. So, I think, like myself, he is critiquing the costs of EA, not FAM (even though "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" is what he has identified as his target).

In her book *There's No Such Thing as a Free Gift*, Linsey McGoey explains the evolution of charity and how it has come to destabilize global welfare. She traces the origins of secular charity to some of America's first tycoons: Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford. They began to give their wealth to public welfare projects, mostly to quell the voices of angry workers who were being exploited for the millionaires' profits. But, even in those situations, it seems like much of the benefits of charity went to the donors. They were able to gain political and social clout and stave off rioting workers. But in doing so, they also undermined the infrastructure of the communities they donated to. She names two reasons why these charities destabilize local welfare: "One is that charitable donations deprive treasuries of tax revenues that could be spent on redistributive welfare policies. The second is that the vast majority of charitable donations do not provide economic relief for low-income individuals" (2015, 18). She identifies that, when private donors fund research, politics, and public welfare, they gain the ability to manipulate all of these spheres to their benefit. This will be discussed more in Section 3.1.2.

One can see how "effective" aid NGOs are by using sites like GiveWell, but it's crucial to remember that they set the standards for their own efficacy. They present their success through tracking the success of the materials and services they are able to purchase and distribute. Then, it is communicated through spreadsheets that are incomprehensible to anyone without a degree in economics (or, at least, to me). But even to the untrained eye, phrases like "moral weights and

discount rate" may instill some doubt in the reader. Again, I don't mean to imply that charities and aid NGOs can't have any positive effects on the communities they aim to help, but they also don't fund research and publish reports on the harm they do.[3]

But by not recognizing the effects and flaws of aid agencies one might support, one may not realize the harm they are indirectly funding. For example, Kuper points to the harm that international aid NGOs enacted while in refugee camps in Rwanda; by encouraging refugees to stay there, many were exposed to cholera and many others were driven to being recruited into armed groups themselves (113). He references the global encouragement of the Green Revolution and the extremely harmful effects it had on farmers in poor areas. McGoey also discusses this misplaced instance of 'help,' outlining the financial, ecological, and political harms this plan had on farmers (2015, 217). These were nationally funded programs, but it doesn't mean that NGOs escape the same effects. I'll remind the reader of the "moral evils" that Singer discussed in "Bystanders to Poverty"; if choosing not to help address global poverty by acting is evil, surely actively making situations worse must be cause for some hesitation, at least.

Kuper gives seven alternative points of suggestion to effective altruists, but he emphasizes that the risks of harm should be considered at least equal to the potential for help:

> Given the complex interdependence and economic political perversities that characterize our shared world, the injunction 'do no harm' deserves at least equal consideration. Or, since we may sometimes have to do some harm to do significant good, —courses of action are rarely cost-free—perhaps the most relevant injunction of all is "proceed carefully." (2002, 114)

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[3] GiveWell does have a section of its website that admits their "mistakes," but they cite it as an opportunity for "lessons learned" and don't point to any consequences for the mistakes. So, even when there is research into wrongdoing, it is more for the sake of retroactive transparency rather than amending their actions or changing their plans for the future.

3.1.2.   Philanthrocapitalism

Linsey McGoey describes a phenomenon called "philanthrocapitalism," where effective altruist charities[4] function like for-profit businesses (even if they're non-profits) and claim that uninhibited capitalism benefits everyone (in a manner reminiscent of trickle-down economics) (2015, 7). She points out the narrative that it is in the interest of capitalists to also be philanthropic, as shown by Rockefeller and Carnegie's relative safety bought by their donations; she writes, "Not only is it no longer necessary to 'disguise' or minimize self-interest, self-interest is championed as the best rationale for helping others. It is seen not as coexisting in tension with altruism, but as a prerequisite for altruism" (20). This appeals to Singer's later suggestions to make self-interest part of giving aid. But this self-congratulatory method of "giving back" has major pitfalls:

> Unfortunately, the belief that aid 'works' is a simplistic and, in many ways, misguided one. It's a notion that diverts attention away from the realities of misplaced research priorities by the world's most powerful pharmaceutical companies, blankets understanding of how trade laws infringe upon national manufacturing and importing capacity, and obscures the role that global financial markets play in creating worldwide food instability. (2015, 27)

She also explains how aid controls the people and countries it aims to help. She references *Dead Aid* by Dambisa Moyo, who claims that private and government-funded aid "unintentionally impedes the economic growth of regions that it seeks to uplift" (McGoey 2015, 38). For example, when the Gates foundation takes over the initiative in a certain area to combat the

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[4] McGoey does not identify them as effective altruist-modeled organizations, but they have the same focus on efficiency and buying QALYs that I believe include them in the practice of effective altruism.

spread of a disease, that means that all government funding around that goal is redirected. This is troubling because it gives the organization providing aid almost full authority on their actions and often removes the voices of people from the affected community in decision making. James Tully writes in *Public Philosophy in a New Key* that this economic control over a region creates a neoimperialist reign over them (2008, 132). McGoey also talks about Carnegie's paternalistic motivations in his philanthropy, citing his writings that show his belief that he could help poor communities more effectively than they would be able to (46). This failure to take multiple perspectives and multicultural understanding into account is one of my later critiques.

McGoey talks about how philanthrocapitalists can pitch their philanthropic pursuits the way they would a startup; as their ultimate goal, they promise a "social return on investment" or SROI, which seems like a vague social and economic analog of the QALY (70). For example, an effective altruist organization may show how many vaccines they are able to distribute for a certain dollar amount. So, following an uptick in polio vaccinations, they can track the social effects of decreased risk for polio. But even as they see positive SROIs, this is no substitute for systemic and sustainable long-term support for communities (80).

Philanthrocapitalists wield disproportionate power over the communities and the causes they're focused on. McGoey writes that "entrepreneurs face market pressures that force their businesses to either evolve or go under. Philanthropists don't face the same pressure, and this is both an advantage and a danger for them. To their advantage, foundations can prioritize politically sensitive areas that governments won't touch" (102). Plus, when all of the hired employees of the organizations are 'qualified' college graduates from wealthy countries and none of them are part of the community that is facing the specific problem, it creates a power imbalance and a lack of checks on their goals or methods. These organizations tend to hire

degree holders from affluent countries to help run their operations, which reinforces the elitism of their employee body, and also provides less hiring opportunities for the members of the communities they're working in.

The power imbalance and systematic destruction are shown well in McGoey's description of the Gates foundation's effect on the American education system; she writes "The problem with the Gates Foundation's increased role in public education [...] is that large-scale efforts to reengineer education systems end up circumscribing rather than expanding choice at the community level" (136). By trying to incentivize schools to do well on standardized tests as a measure of success, students, teachers, and administrators are forced to scramble to compete, putting schools with less funding at an automatic and debilitating disadvantage to those with available resources like tutors. But, philanthropists face no risk when their actions fail their causes; these failures to 'solve the problem' keep their organizations afloat (147).

In an alarming addition to the networking and profit that philanthrocapitalists stand to gain, they are literally praised as effective altruists by Singer himself:

> The most influential academic to emphasize this perception of the [Gates] foundation is Peter Singer, a controversial Australian philosopher who has praised Gates and Warren Buffett for being the 'most effective altruists in history.' During a TED talk in 2013, Singer pointed to a screenshot and said, 'This is the website of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and if you look at the words on the top right-hand side, it says, "All lives have equal value." That's the understanding, the rational understanding of our situation in the world that has led to these people being the most effective altruists in history, Bill and Melinda Gates, and Warren Buffett.' (McGoey 2015, 146)

Bill Gates' effect on global health shows how philanthrocapitalists[5] can have a wildly disproportionate effect on global welfare systems. By focusing on the most easily achievable goals, the smallest and most easily addressed problems are prioritized for the sake of showing SROI (160). This manipulation of countries' infrastructure has a direct link to neocolonialism: "Varoufakis argues that IMF [International Monetary Fund] conditions conspired to create the developing world's second brutal historical disaster, leaving countries as enfeebled as they were at the peak of nineteenth-century imperialism and its associated slave trade" (172). In addition to that, pharmaceutical corporations are allowed to sue other countries for using their intellectual property under TRIPS[6], meaning the U.S. can issue sanctions against the whole country 'in violation' of using an authorized medical technology, even if it's necessary for the health and wellbeing of their citizens (187). This kind of intellectual property litigation applies to all U.S. exports, including agricultural products and technology. Forcing countries to buy the intellectual rights to every vaccine does not seem very altruistic in my opinion, and, as Tully said, reinforces the imperial relationships between countries. This is a joint effort between governmental and nongovernmental philanthrocapitalist organizations to priotize profit over well-being.

McGoey points to Robert Reich's statements that regulations should be placed on this uninhibited philanthrocapitalism:

> Reich suggests that governments have an obligation to ensure that philanthropic grants are being used in a way that helps to alleviate some of the harms of increased inequality. So far, there's little evidence that US philanthropy is meeting that goal. One of his key arguments is that 'public policy does not do enough to encourage philanthropic behaviour that aims at greater equality. Worse, public policy currently rewards some philanthropic

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[5] At this point, I am equating "philanthrocapitalist" with "effective altruist" because I don't believe there is any significant difference between them.
[6] This is the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Agreement made by the World Trade Organization.

behaviour —in the form of tax concessions—that worsens social inequalities and causes harm. The state is therefore implicated in these philanthropic harms.' (231)

In a slightly satirical essay entitled "The Liberal Communists of Porto Davos," Slavoj Žižek criticizes these patterns. Essentially, CEOs-turned-philanthropists have created a system in which they take resources from poor communities with one hand and repackage them at a discount to themselves with the other. This article is nearly 16 years old, but it has only become more biting and true. He laments the more radical forces of Porto Alegre that were actively trying to fight this sort of capitalist control being seemingly bought out. There seems to be more advantage to being on the side of the philanthropists, or as Singer might say, more incentive and appeal to self-serving nature. Plus, in controlling the market and general welfare, they can get resources and labor for cheap:

> So their goal is not to earn money, but to change the world (and, in this way, as a by-product, make even more money)[...] In the liberal communist ethics, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity: Charity today is the humanitarian mask that hides the underlying economic exploitation. In a blackmail of gigantic proportions, the developed countries are constantly 'helping' the undeveloped (with aid, credits, etc.), thereby avoiding the key issue, namely, their complicity in and co-responsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped. [...] While they fight subjective violence, liberal communists are the very agents of the structural violence that creates the conditions for such explosions of subjective violence. (Žižek 2006)

He goes as far as to name liberal-progressives as the "enemy" of making real progressive change, which is also clear in INCITE!'s *The Revolution Will Not be Funded*.

3.1.3.   *The Revolution Will Not be Funded*

INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence is an activist group focused on liberation and ending violence against communities of color. In 2007, they published an anthology of essays called *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,* which discusses the negative constraints that non-profit organizations are put under by state and private funding. It also details the structural problems that exist in non-profits and their effects on the communities they claim to serve. It also suggests that radical action can happen without funding from the state or private donors.

As a group navigating a need for funding to operate, they discuss their experience with government grants and private funding. They recount when they were offered a grant by the Ford Foundation, but had it revoked when they made public their support for Palestinian sovereignty (2007, 1). They note patterns in *who* is given funding; only groups that have palatable goals (in the government or organization's view) can sustain funding. They write "So, essentially, foundations provide a cover for white supremacy. Reminiscent of Rockefeller's strategy, people of color deserve individual relief but people of color organized to end white supremacy become a menace to society" (2007, 8). They identify the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) as a complement to the prison industrial complex; it allows the government to "[manage] and [control] dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus" (9). INCITE! and Dean Spade both write about the government's cooptations of radical agendas, which allow them to control and oversee their actions. This is why INCITE! decided to stop relying on federal and private funding, because they could be co-opted and controlled by institutions that simply meant to manage them rather than support them.

Aid NGOs have also had connections to the CIA, which has been proven to directly undermine and stop revolutionary groups like the Black Panther Party. INCITE![7] writes, "The Ford Foundation was actively involved through its various programs in diverting the antiapartheid movement in South Africa from an anticapitalist to a pro-capitalist movement" (14).

The only way to make real systemic change, they argue, is without the funding and support of the government or private aid organizations. They write,

> To radically change society, we must build mass movements that can topple systems of domination, such as capitalism. However, the NPIC encourages us to think of social justice organizing as a career; that is, you do the work if you can get paid for it. However, a mass movement requires the involvement of millions of people, most of whom cannot get paid. By trying to do grassroots organizing through this careerist model, we are essentially asking a few people to work more than full-time to make up for the work that needs to be done by millions. (2007, 10)

Effective altruists might acknowledge that they don't do anything to stop systemic harm, although they would likely say that their profit and control over countries is not a goal, simply a side effect of their actions. And, while I agree that immediate need must be addressed, I maintain that it ought to be done in a way that doesn't worsen its potential in the future. Systemic change and immediate aid do not have to be a trade-off; they can happen simultaneously.

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[7] This chapter of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* is written by Andrea Smith, who has been plausibly accused about lying about having Cherokee heritage; she has ignored demands of transparency from Indigenous activists. It's clearly troubling that I am citing her as a voice of agency in marginalized groups as she has continually evaded accountability and questions about her identity. As worrying as that is, I do think that this article, as well as the work of INCITE!, offers important ideas and messages about solidarity and action, and thus I have chosen to keep these sections that quote her part of this anthology, without condoning her actions.

As Andrew Kuper says, "do no harm" should be of *at least* equal consideration when approaching the end goal of providing aid. We need to reconfigure the ways we think of charity and philanthropy, especially when relying on the rich; as Kuper writes: "the amount of donating and the extent of sacrifice are not the central issue; the real set of issues is how to redeploy resources and energy to roles and institutions within an extremely complex division of labor" (119). However, perhaps being able to recognize this harm is an epistemic limit that effective altruists do not recognize. In the following sections, I will discuss possible objections that effective altruists could have to my view and my responses to them, which serve as further critiques of EA.

3.2.   Effective Altruist Objections and My Responses

3.2.1.   Incommensurate Values

The first possible objection I will discuss is the advantage of cost-efficacy in effective altruism. I will outline how efficacy and cost-effectiveness are not comparable values to preserving human life and establishing sustainable systems of living.

A possible response that an effective altruist could offer to my critique is the idea that having an effective scale with which to measure accomplished "good" is an important marker of progress and how to move forward. Of course, it's helpful to have some sense of direction and progress, especially when trying to tackle such a daunting problem as global poverty. But, I think that using money as a metric for calculating SROI or the highest calculable number of lives saved by investing in a certain cause is concerning. This would seem to lead them to try to tackle only the most easily solved and quantifiable problems, rather than others that may need equal attention. An effective altruist's counterargument is not hard to imagine; they might say "we are

saving lives—this is not the time to split hairs about what values are more important." There is truth to this; I can't claim that effective altruism doesn't have any positive effects, but I do believe that the negative effects and fundamental misapplications of value in the motivation of effective altruism deserve at least equal attention. I think it is possible to recognize that working to preserve QALYs can save many lives, without endorsing the idea that our goal should be maximizing QALYS.

It is also possible that the effective altruist could explain their actions by appealing to value pluralism, or the idea "that there are many different moral values" (Mason 2018). They might say that they value cost-effectiveness and human life, even if these can't be compared to one another on the same scale. There are some situations in which "there is a conflict between things that have different advantages and disadvantages. The better option may be better, but it does not 'make up for' the lesser option, because it isn't the same sort of thing. Thus there is a remainder—a moral value that is lost in the choice, and that it is rational to regret" (Mason 2018). They could say that they regret the apparent callousness of effective altruism and its systemic effects, but that regret is a natural side-effect of having to make a moral choice. To run an aid organization, they have to make choices on who to save, and they need some sort of tool to help them decide who they can save. If their goal is to maximize QALYs, then they will choose the cause that will let them save another for the same amount of money. Even if it is always about saving lives, using the relative prices to decide which ones are worth saving over others seems wrong. I believe that if effective altruists were *truly* committed to stopping human suffering, they would devote more attention to the structures that cause material need.

I think this view fails to recognize the mistake of using money as a measurement to balance the investment potential of lives to be saved. Some values are just not able to be

measured on the same scale, so they can't be compared when trying to make a decision. I will argue that measuring by QALYs and SROI fundamentally misapplies monetary values to human life by assuming they are comparable values and that one can be traded for another. Human lives should not be measured against money, and some should not be valued over others because they can be bought at a better discount.

Ruth Chang describes incommensurate values by saying they "'lack a common measure'" (2013, 1). She explains that they apply differently to epistemic cases and practical ethics, but I think both uses are helpful here. An analogous example may help illustrate this point. Say I am faced with a decision between participating in a school tradition and completing my homework. The tradition holds a lot of meaning to me and the community I belong to. At the same time, my grades are important to me, and I risk lowering my grades in the class if I don't complete the assignment. I am being forced to choose between the value of community belonging and the value of academic success. While these are both important to me, there doesn't seem to be an appropriate way to compare the two of them to choose the 'better' course of action. I lose some value regardless of what I decide to do, but my decision can't be made by comparing these values.

I believe that money and human well-being are not able to be truly understood in relation to each other, and they should certainly not be measured in terms of one another. Because these two cannot be equated on the same scale, it is a mistake to use money as a means to measure the value of human well-being. Chang explains how some scholars, including Kant, believe that values of "dignity" and "price" are separate; she allows that "[i]f Kant is right, then the proper valuation of goods requires a recognition that status goods cannot be measured by the same unit as commodity goods" (2013, 6). Because they don't share a common system of measurement,

they can't be priced in terms of one another. If we are forced to choose one, "then it follows that they cannot be substituted for one another without remainder, and thus, no matter which alternative one chooses, some value will be lost" (Chang 2013, 7).

Elizabeth Anderson specifically connects the values of economic efficiency and human well-being in her book *Value in Ethics and Economics*, an account of how we imagine the value of objects and relationships in ethics, and how they translate to the market. Anderson points out our tendency to compare these different types of values and discusses how we can think about their differences. She returns to Kant's labeling of intrinsic and extrinsic goods, separating human dignity from commodities (1993, 19). Anderson succinctly explains the mistake of comparing intrinsic and extrinsic values:

> To attempt to reduce the plurality of standards to a single standard, ground, or good-constituting property threatens to obliterate the self-understandings in terms of which we make sense of and differentiate our emotions, attitudes, and concerns. To adopt a monist theory of value as our self-understanding is to hopelessly impoverish our responsive capacities to a monolithic 'pro' or 'con' attitude or to mere desire and aversion. (1993, 5)

By removing the nuance of emotion and the different values of human interaction, we reduce all values to a single Goodness. This seems to encapsulate the sort of Good that effective altruists seek; it includes economic wealth, human wellbeing, and efficiency, conveniently rolling them all up into one value.

But valuing extrinsic goods the same as intrinsic goods seems to lessen the value of intrinsic goods. I agree with Anderson's point that "[a]ctions that promote welfare ruthlessly, manipulatively, or unjustly are not benevolent. Actions that maximize welfare by exploiting

some so that others may benefit do not express benevolence toward those exploited" (1993, 29).

I think this sharp critique of maximizing welfare to these ends applies perfectly to my view on

effective altruism. Exploiting others (as philanthrocapitalists do) and weighing lives against each

other as possible investments does not express true benevolence.

Anderson devotes attention to consequentialism (the theory that we should pursue the

actions that we think will bring about the best overall consequences) and how it can easily

misapply value in pursuit of (effective altruist) good. She writes "no compelling theoretical or

proactive reasons demand the global maximization of value. [...] there is no single measure of

value for all contexts. There are many measures of value valid for different contexts and

purposes" (1993, 63).

In short, it seems that using money as a measure to determine which human lives are

worth investing in, for an aid organization, is a failure to recognize what makes being a human

special—our relationships and emotional connections to one another. Anderson writes, "we

cannot regard meaningfulness as adding some quantum of value to otherwise consequentially

valuable lives. To attempt to regard meaningfulness in this way is to engage in incoherent

deliberation and to derail the rational attitudes that give life its meaning and point" (1993, 83).

The 'benevolence' of effective altruists also consistently places them in the position of the giver

(mostly because of their economic advantage) and never in a multidirectional relationship of

benefits. Anderson says that this "accounting mentality reflects an unwillingness to be in the debt

of another and, hence, an unwillingness to enter into the longer-term commitments such debts

entail. The debts friends owe to one another are not of a kind that they can be repaid as to leave

nothing between them" (1993, 152). By understanding that relationships are built on a sort of

willing interdependence, it implies a tacit acknowledgment that the relationship is more meaningful than the debt owed.

3.2.2. Epistemic Limitations

Another possible counterargument that an effective altruist might raise is that effective altruism seems like the best option we have at the moment. By being able to track where the money goes and how much it can buy, it seems like the most certain course of action when trying to select a charity and provide a donation. However, I do not find this response entirely convincing. I think that in deciding one way of giving is the "best" way or the way to do the "most good" (as EA puts it), effective altruists are not as mindful of their epistemic limits as they ought to be. Because individuals are not always sure of the full and lasting impact of our actions, we need to be careful in picking our course of action and be willing to accept that we may be mistaken. A certain level of epistemic humility seems necessary when trying to impact the lives of so many others. However, the charities that effective altruists support have the investments of their donors and the health of their organization at stake, and admitting that their methods are not yielding good results will mean disaster for their organization (and reputation), making it a very unattractive option for philanthrocapitalists. Linsey McGoey quotes Ruth McCambridge, former editor-in-chief of the *Nonprofit Quarterly,* on her worries about this lack of accountability and epistemic humility for "mega-philanthropies," saying "once tens of millions of dollars have been invested in one organization, what will the willingness be to reverse that course, even if it is clearly falling short or failing or causing unanticipated harm to communities or community infrastructures?" (McGoey 2015, 71). I will show in three ways how the epistemic limitations of EA organizations may mislead them in their quests to do the most good. I aim to show why I

reject P1 of EA because I think we don't know *how* to do the most good, and people making decisions in charities and aid NGOs aren't in the best positions to make those decisions.

The first epistemic limitation of EA is the puzzle of indeterminate duties. One critic of Singer's is Violetta Igneski, who distinguishes between the duty to rescue and the duty to aid. She claims that both are equally strong and while we have an obligation to both acts, they are structurally different in what they demand. The duty to rescue has clear, determinate actions that must be fulfilled to successfully 'rescue,' but the duty to aid necessitates a less clear course of action. This is important in demonstrating the importance of long-term aid and in helping to diffuse Singer's strong and uniform demands by identifying different types of duty and action. The ambiguity of the duty to aid also illustrates the challenge of our epistemic limits.

Singer focuses on the duty to aid a lot; he says that we normally think of giving money as charity, or a supererogatory act (1972, 235). No one says you have to give to charity, but people think it's good to do. It's an above-and-beyond commitment. Singer disagrees with this; he says it's not just something nice we can do around the holidays, but a binding and continuous duty. If we have the income to give some of it away, we have to. He writes, "we ought to give the money away, and it is wrong not to do so" (1972, 235). This is the demand that drives FAM.

Singer's example of the child drowning in the pond in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" necessitates a singular correct reaction to the situation: jump in and pull the child out of the water. There is a prescribed duty to rescue, as Igneski shows. However, the duty to aid, which is really what Singer is concerned with, does not prescribe one specific action. Therefore, we have no strong guidance on how to act or what to do to "aid." Igneski writes, "Categorizing different types of duties does not fit in with Singer's account because he recognizes only one type of moral requirement—the requirement to prevent suffering (or to maximize the good). According to

Singer, we have this obligation in every situation where we can prevent suffering" (2001, 53). But this fails to recognize the difference between a duty to rescue, which has one clear course of action, and the duty to aid, which brings us back to the question of "how can I help?"

The second epistemic challenge to EA is our inability to give an account of our actions. In Judith Butler's essay "An Account of Oneself," she addresses the problems that our epistemic limits have on us, especially in trying to act in solidarity with others. Since we can never really know ourselves outside of the limited terms our societies grant us, she says, we can never truly know the effects of the actions we choose, but we should still make the most ethical choices we can.

I think that in this challenge of presenting an "account" of our actions, focused on being accountable to others considering the harm we've done to them, it's sometimes hard to know how to explain ourselves when we have such a fleeting idea of what our "selves" are. Existentialism aside, it's important to think of our accountability when building solidarity and trying to help others. How can an effective altruist understand the harm they might be inflicting if they're completely ignorant of the harm itself? This feels especially relevant when decision makers in charities and aid NGOs are educated "experts" from affluent countries; this difference in lived experience may make it harder for this type of agent to predict the actual consequences of their actions. Importantly, however, this challenge to understanding doesn't excuse a lack of accountability.

She recommends a sort of reflexivity, thinking about who we are and our relationships with others, but still recognizing the epistemic limits we have. When confronted with the challenge of accountability when we don't understand who we are or what our relationships with others mean, trying to enter into solidarity with others is a confusing task. Butler writes:

My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. [...] But does this mean that I am not, in the moral sense, accountable for who I am and for what I do? If I find that, despite my best efforts, a certain opacity persists and I cannot make myself fully accountable to you, is this ethical failure? Or is it a failure that gives rise to another ethical disposition in the place of a full and satisfying notion of narrative accountability? Is there in this affirmation of partial transparency a possibility for acknowledging a relationality that binds me more deeply to language and to you than I previously knew? And is the relationality that conditions and blinds this 'self' not, precisely, an indispensable resource for ethics? (2001, 40)

This inconsistency between understanding ourselves and others is significant because it *requires* community and communication in solving problems. This will be discussed more in the next section.

The final epistemic challenge posed to EA is the conflict between localism and globalization. Singer makes some strong claims about the relationship between the giver and recipient of aid. He warns us not to let geographical proximity limit who we help, saying that distance "makes no moral difference" (231). He says that this is important because it does not matter that this specific individual is the person you are trying to help, and, likewise, it does not matter that you are the person in the position to help them (232). Singer thinks both of these factors are not relevant, and neither you nor the person who receives the aid are important as individuals; it is simply a redistribution of resources. He separates cognitive and emotional empathy, labeling emotional empathy "misleading" in trying to effectively do the most good (77); when you are affected by personal biases in favor of specific people, you won't be able to successfully identify or give to the causes you really should because your priorities will be

shifted by the care you have for them. He also talks at length about egoism and savior complexes, but then he claims that the difference between egoism and altruism isn't important if you're making a difference (104). Because he identifies giving as a duty, and not truly an act of altruism, we are fulfilling our duties by giving our wealth in his view. This is how we get the "altruism" in effective altruism; it's differentiated from charity, even though it uses charity as its primary vehicle. I agree with the importance of not letting geographical bias limit our solidarity with others, and I appreciate Singer's acknowledgment that proximity holds the advantage of potential familiarity with one's circumstances. I think that this is one way to be more aware of our epistemic limits; by remaining present in a community with people who are closer to us, we can build relationships, communicate, and perhaps understand them better than people in different circumstances.

In her phenomenal book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance,* Leanne Betasamosake Simpson highlights the value of Indigenous knowledge learned from the land and how the power structures of colonial institutions have separated people from their cultural ideas and each other. Simpson appeals to an idea of "grounded normativity," which attends to the needs of our environments and relies on local communities to make decisions. This idea is closely related to collective care (both between humans and land) and centering the knowledge and experiences of those affected by racism, colonialism, and institutional oppression.

Grounded normativity is an answer to Butler's question on how to provide an account of ourselves. Simpson writes: "I don't know it so much as an 'ethical framework' but as a series of complex, interconnected cycling processes that make up a nonlinear, overlapping emergent and responsive network of relationships of deep reciprocity, intimate and global interconnection and

interdependence, that spirals across time and space" (2017, 24). Speaking from her experience as a Nishnaabeg scholar, she explains the importance of gaining knowledge from the land on which she lives and the people she is in community with. The values of "consent, reciprocity, respect, and empathy" are paramount to grounded normativity and Nishnaabeg knowledge (2017, 61). By being in relationships with others, we exchange information and stories and build solidarity.

Specifically, when trying to consider our epistemic limits, Simpson talks about her own interpretations of other scholars' knowledge. She asks herself before using a certain piece of knowledge: under what context it was created, if it applies to her situation and community, does it replicate systems of oppression, and related questions (61). These questions spark reflective consideration of what systems we may be participating in and upholding. She also recommends some hesitancy toward unwavering reliance on data (the effective altruist's best tool) because of its "decontextualized" nature without any other forms of investigation (156). Building relationships when working with others against systems of harm is a practice that "is deliberate, ethical, and profoundly careful within Nishnaabewin because to do otherwise is considered arrogant and intrusive with the potential to interfere with other beings' life pathways" (156). The following quotation from Simpson shows the significance of grounded normativity in building solidarity and creating new systems of care for the future, which will be discussed in the next section:

Constellations then become networks within the larger whole. Individual stars shine in their own right and exist, grounded in their everyday renewal of Indigenous practices and in constellated relationships, meaning relationships that operate from within the grounded normativity of particular Indigenous nations, not only with other stars but also the

physical world and the spiritual world. Constellations in relationship with other

constellations form flight paths out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity. (217)

3.2.3. Duty to Vision (Over Space and Time)

Another possible objection that an effective altruist might have to my stance has to do

with their focus on solving problems in the *present*; there is too much to do right now to justify

worrying about larger systematic problems and the future. While I agree that meeting immediate

needs is the priority of being in solidarity with others, I believe there is a twin priority in

planning for the future. The two are not mutually exclusive by any means. This is a general

rejection of an assumption that underlies EA: that every problem needs to be solved as quickly as

possible because of its urgency. Yet, by simultaneously meeting present needs and combating the

problems that create needs in the future, we make more room in the future for other goals rather

than always being solely preoccupied with the present. I don't mean to sound overly naive in

saying that we can meet all material needs in the present and the near future; this will not be a

simple (or even completely achievable) task. However, by laying the foundations for the future,

the networks of aid and solidarity will already exist, making them easier to use and navigate in

the future.

Solidarity is mutual support and pursuit of a common goal; it is reciprocal and involves

collective action across identity groups, borders, and experiences. This is my own definition, but

in his book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)*, Dean Spade

explains solidarity as being "what builds and connects large-scale movements" (2020, 14). It also

encourages agency and action without waiting for the support of systems like the state that often

undermine the autonomy and well-being of vulnerable groups. In the book, Spade discusses the

utility of mutual aid (which will be discussed more in section 4) and says that solidarity is an important part of our goal because "we should be working toward locally controlled, participatory, transparent structures to replace our crumbling and harmful infrastructure" (19). This kind of solidarity is also aided by geographical proximity (but that isn't a necessary factor). Spade writes "Locally operated mutual aid works better for meeting people's needs in all kinds of situations, including disasters because our needs are best met by those with the most local knowledge, and when we are the ones making the decisions affecting us" (41).

This local solidarity and community are also discussed in the Care Collective's book *The Care Manifesto*, another part of the Verso series in which Spade's *Mutual Aid* was published. The Care Collective argues that caring for one another has become crucial during the pandemic and that care-focused practices can shape a more sustainable and prosperous future. Care should be included in politics, they argue, and more focus should be placed on collectivism, rather than the individualism encouraged by capitalism. As they argue, because so much of "care" work has been associated with women's work, it has been written off and its importance undervalued. However, that doesn't mean it's not still a necessary part of our lives. They write that "'really not caring' is presented by the right as a form of 'realism'; strong evidence of what we term the banality of carelessness. It also shows how crucial the question of dependency, and interdependency, is for our societies and our lives, at every single level, and the multiple destructions caused when these interdependencies are denied" (2020, 18).

Even Singer acknowledges the root of the separation of self-interest and ethics is due to the individualism of Western culture and capitalism in *How Are We to Live?*; he writes "we must question the view of self-interest that has dominated Western society for a long time" (25). It becomes a question of trust; because there are no significant incentives to be honest, one has

more to gain if they are dishonest and exploit others. Singer compares this to the Prisoner's

Dilemma, where information asymmetry makes it so that two parties (who have more to gain if

they cooperate) won't know if the other will cooperate or defect and take advantage of them.

They are both being interrogated; if they both lie to protect each other they will get less jail time,

but if one betrays the other and sells them out, they will get less jail time than the other. It creates

a situation in which neither of the two knows whether or not they can trust the other, and have

the choice of being betrayed by the other, betraying the other, or cooperating. Because it's

difficult to believe that the other will help you somewhat altruistically, the player has a safe

option in choosing to not help the other and betray them. Singer explains the connection to

self-interest and ethics, writing that "[t]he problem is that people who begin with the attitude of

not wanting to be the only sucker are likely to treat each new encounter with suspicion, and the

more who hold this attitude, the more difficult it is to make co-operative efforts work for the

common good" (29). This alienation from one another makes cooperation disadvantageous at

worst and unreliable at best. He also connects this to a weak sense of community; pointing to the

increase of unhoused Americans after the Reagan administration, he says "a society that prefers

to cut tax rates on the very rich rather than to help the poor and homeless has ceased to be a

community in any real sense of the term" (34). He likens the effects of the free market to a

Hobbesian state of anarchy, where we simply see one another as opportunities for profit (40).

While I don't agree with everything Singer writes in the book, I think he correctly identifies this

individualism and conflation of living ethically with being a "sucker."

In *A Darwinian Left,* Singer believes that shaping leftist action around human patterns of

self-interest will make them easier and feel more beneficial for those involved. He says that one

necessary aspect is hierarchy (39), not because it's good, but because it is a natural facet of

human societies. He says that public policy can "appeal to the widespread need to feel wanted, or useful, or to belong to a community - all things that are more likely to come from cooperating with others than from competing with them" (42). Here he returns to the Prisoner's Dilemma, reminding us that both of the prisoners acting altruistically gives them the best result. Since capitalist societies are organized to condition us out of acting altruistically, he says we need to "change the pay-off[s] so cheats do not prosper" (52). One of these changes would be making it so that everyone is equally included in the community; with no othered groups, the society will have no "adversaries" (53).

These dependencies we have upon each other are important; they create relationships and open channels for political and community action. But, the Care Collective encourages *promiscuous care*: "In advocating for promiscuous care, we do not mean caring casually or indifferently. It is neoliberal capitalist care that remains detached, both casual and indifferent, with disastrous consequences. For us, promiscuous care is an ethics that proliferates outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant" (32). This seems to apply a similar idea to Singer's geographic impartiality, but leaves behind his emphasis on not developing a personal bias toward those one is helping. It has the best of both emotional empathy and geographic impartiality.

But these communities of care also need to be focused on ending the systems that necessitate their actions: "To be clear, what 'caring communities' does not mean is using people's spare time to plug the caring gaps left wide open by neoliberalism. It means ending neoliberalism in order to expand people's capacities to care. To be truly democratic will involve forms of municipal care that put an end to corporate abuse, generate co-operatives and replace outsourcing with insourcing" (41). They write:

We need to build on these existing progressive transnational institutions so that they

reflect the needs of all populations around the globe, rather than do the bidding of the

most powerful. Indeed, it is global corporations and financial institutions, loosely tied to

powerful nation states, that have been responsible for so much environmental wreckage

up until now. Environmental devastation, as we know, disproportionately affects the

world's poorest economies and populations. These struggling economies are frequently

the legacy of Western imperialism and neo-colonialism, former colonial territories that

have for decades been sapped by debt repayments, undermining their service

infrastructures and leaving so many destitute. Prioritising global care necessarily means

tackling global inequality. (60)

This interdependence means that everyone has something to offer and something to gain

(45), and this means that communities both rely on one another but have agency in their

solidarity networks. This applies across distances but requires care in every interaction (64).

My last point about working towards the future is the importance of vision. An effective

altruist may claim that they are focused on solving current problems; wasting time thinking about

the future may lose precious time in the present. But, it is important to tackle both. Planning

for/trying to plan for the future can be difficult when we can only imagine it looking the way the

present does. So, this requires some work in our imaginative capacities. I will borrow José

Medina's idea of imaginative resistance and resistant imaginations to illustrate this point.

Imaginative resistance is a phenomenon that occurs when one is unable or refuses

(usually on moral ground) to imagine a different way that the world could be (Medina 2012,

254). This can be a significant obstacle to any visionary work that requires disengagement with the current systems we have in place, but it also poses a threat to solidarity:

> Different ways of imagining can sensitize or desensitize people to human experiences—not only those of others, but even one's own; they can make people feel close or distant to others—and even to aspects of themselves; and they can create or sever social bonds, affective ties, and relations of empathy or antipathy, solidarity or lack of solidarity. (253)

Refusing or being able to imagine someone's reality that is different from yours is a weak foundation for solidarity; also having an open imagination is necessary for imagining the future, especially when it needs to look different from the present.

This kind of visionary imagination is what Medina calls resistant imagination. Having different perspectives and holding them all at the same value creates a more "pluralized" vision that accounts for views that have been excluded or silenced in discussions of political agency. Medina argues that communities *need* to be "radically pluralized, so that, by placing a radical openness to differences at its core, we can use the imagination critically to open up paths for liberation and to construct heterogeneous publics that function democratically" (266).

This prescribes a certain practice of reflectiveness, especially for "privileged subjects," who Medina (citing Sandra Harding) says "should be conscientiously disloyal to their privilege and cultivate 'traitorous' attitudes and orientations that disrupt unquestioned assumptions and prejudices" (310). This also requires a commitment to maintaining an open imagination and working against imaginative resistance; to not do so is "a failure of the imagination" (309).

I hope that these last three sections have shown how I would refute some of the objections an effective altruist would have to my critiques of EA. Because none of these replies

have been sufficiently convincing to me, I want to discuss a possible alternative form of

delivering support: mutual aid.

4. Looking Forward

4.1. Mutual Aid

In light of these serious concerns about charities and philanthropic aid, the question still stands: what else is there? If you're so against philanthrocapitalism, then what do you recommend as a replacement? As I've said before, I don't think it's completely wise to immediately defund and abandon all aid organizations; doing so might disregard the beneficial work that some of them can achieve. Additionally, because these organizations have replaced and warped the infrastructures of the communities they aim to help, removing them could cause a temporary or permanent lack of needed resources. Instead, by transferring the decision-making in these organizations to the communities affected by them, informed decisions and transitional changes will be put in place. I think it would also be helpful to place more restrictions on international aid NGOs, especially when they don't work closely with the affected communities. I admit it's naive to think that we could get rid of charities or aid NGOs in a matter of years, especially when they are the projects so many billionaires have sunk money and reputational currency into. That instead leaves a duty for the rest of us: mutual aid. Where philanthrocapitalist organizations do not help, and even cause harm, there are actionable things that we as community members can do to fill those gaps. Mutual aid is no replacement for reparations or reliable infrastructure, but it is something that individuals can do to stand in solidarity with others and enter mutual support networks. By showing care and building community, we can support each other as equal individuals without using charities as an intermediary that can withhold and spend money as it wills.

In what sense am I talking about mutual aid? I believe that Kropotkin's idea of mutual aid is less so a political one than Bakunin and Spade's (discussed more below). I am more concerned with a political idea of mutual aid, which is the same as Kropotkin's but importantly builds political solidarity among the group it creates by starting discussion and demanding action among members. I will be discussing mutual aid as a *non-hierarchical community-based practice of mutually meeting changing needs by providing resources, skills, and time while simultaneously building political solidarity, wherein everyone has something to give and something to gain.* It is reminiscent of Singer's idea of reciprocal altruism from *A Darwinian Left*, both appealing to our self-interested nature and ethical drive to help others.

Mutual aid is by no means a new practice. Simply put, it is the practice of meeting others' needs in a community by sharing resources. This is a longstanding practice among many species, being somewhat related to kinship but not exclusive to individuals who are related. It is crucial to note that mutual aid has been practiced and written about by marginalized communities, especially communities of color who are affected by the exclusive standards that the state and NGOs set for possible recipients of aid. Their work and organizing must not go unappreciated.

One of the earlier and often cited works about mutual aid is *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* by Peter Kropotkin in 1908. Following the societal focus on Darwinism and evolution, Kropotkin pointed out that mutual aid is a commonly found phenomenon in animals and humans; despite arguments to the contrary that mutual aid is harmful to evolution, Kropotkin argued that he saw "mutual aid and mutual support carried on to an extent which made [him] suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution" (1908, 2). A Russian anarchist, Kropotkin pointed out that this sort of mutual support is an instinct and useful tool for survival, citing early human history as well as

animal behavior. Trying to move away from the morally dubious lines of thought stemming from social Darwinism, he thought that mutual aid was an important influence in the positive evolution of any species.

A few decades earlier, another Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, published *Statism and Anarchy,* in which he discussed the state of Russia in 1873. He identifies statism and nationalism as antithetical to the well-being of humans that live under them. The state-encouraged exclusive alliances to one's town/tzar make it impossible to establish solidarity with working-class people of other communities (1873, 215). He calls on young people to unite these isolated communities and (violently) rise against the state and turn to anarchy (1873, 211). It is important to mention that he does not mean anarchy in the standard colloquial understanding (i.e. violent chaos) but in the political sense. He defines anarchy as "the free and independent organization of all the units and parts of the community and their voluntary federation from below upward, not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one, and not by the dictates of any scientific theory, but as a result of the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself" (198). He talks about how the state must necessarily enslave citizens for its survival (179) and commits acts that would be crimes if perpetrated by people (169). He also argues, the reason nationalism is so harmful is that it is shown best when being used as a weapon against non-citizens and is a rationalizing tool for excusing violence committed on behalf of the state.

This helps connect aid organizations to the state, while also demonstrating how marginalized people are often treated by the state. When they are necessarily harmed by the country they live in, it is in the country's best interest to seem like it is providing aid to keep marginalized citizens in a subjugated position where they are continually used for labor. Only by

organizing of their own volition will the oppressed be able to determine each other's needs and meet them without state interference.

In his 2020 book, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis and the Next*, Dean Spade outlines why mutual aid is a crucial tool for survival during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, and any other time. Focusing on how to get involved and understand the difference between charity and mutual aid, Spade lays out what mutual aid is, why it's important, and provides a guide on how to start a mutual aid group and keep it running sustainably and successfully.

He cites many instances during the pandemic when people practiced mutual aid in their communities: sharing and making PPE, picking up groceries for neighbors, starting group funds for medical bills, and more. In the face of panic and inadequate planning from the government, people rose to meet many of the needs of their community members.

Spade identifies mutual aid as "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them. Those systems, in fact, have often created the crisis, or are making things worse" (11). By meeting these needs among ourselves, we create community and understanding of the problems our neighbors face while learning how we can help and what we can do to stop these problems before they arise. This is how we build solidarity. Because "capitalism and colonialism created structures that have disrupted how people have historically connected with each other and shared everything they needed to survive," many people have lost the wider networks outside of their immediate friends and families that connect them to their communities (11). By asking for help, we make ourselves vulnerable and cultivate relationships of care within our communities. This is especially important to note for those who are not helped by the state or aid agencies; there are

many reasons for which these organizations will not help an individual. Perhaps if they struggle with sobriety, have a criminal record, an underlying health condition, or do not have a consistent address at which they can stay, these agencies can avoid giving aid to people who are often very vulnerable. So, it must be the duty of their communities to make sure that their needs are met.

Solidarity is important because we must understand *why* some people's needs are not met; it is not through a fault of their own, but they are intentionally excluded from the infrastructures that are meant to help them. Their innocence in the situation is irrelevant; their needs as human beings deserve to be met regardless of their actions. However, recognizing their exclusion from federal and NGO organizations is important because of the history surrounding the rhetoric of aid recipients being irresponsible with their welfare or incapable of sustaining their own support. Yet the U.S. government has not responded well to this community-driven aid; Spade cites the government's co-optation of the Black Panther Party's breakfast program (only after destroying the Party's iteration of it) (11). He discusses the long traditions of mutual aid, going back to the 18th century in America where Black communities would crowdfund to pay for necessary expenses like rent, insurance, and funeral services (14) and working-class communities would support themselves while workers were on strike for better conditions (15). By connecting and gaining time through the lessened stress of having one's needs met, people have more availability and emotional energy to organize and mobilize. By spending time with one another and learning about the problems others face, people can begin to expand beyond their hesitancy and work against this imaginative resistance.

Mutual aid differs from charity, too, in its non-hierarchical, participatory nature. There are no CEOs of mutual aid organizations. Decisions are met by consensus or committees for certain tasks; this way, no specific person or group can dominate the agenda of the group. People

also don't usually get paid for this work, which means that they do it because it's important to them and necessary for the survival of their communities. Spending more time in these practices "can also generate boldness and a willingness to defy illegitimate authority. Taking risks with a group for a shared purpose can be a reparative experience when we have been trained to follow rules" (18). This boldness allows people to confront the aspects of the system they have access to.

Mutual aid is also different from charity because it confronts and works to change the systems that cause harm. Spade talks about charity's roots in giving alms for indulgences and that it "is designed to help improve the image of the elites who are funding it and put a tiny, inadequate Band-Aid on the massive social wound that their greed creates" (20). This echoes McGoey's critiques of philanthrocapitalism. Spade also talks about the standards that charities hold their recipients to, essentially deciding who is "deserving," while often reinforcing racist, sexist, and classist ideas in the process (20). These organizations also design their programs to make recipients of aid feel guilty, ashamed, and manipulated into being willing to "accept any work at any exploitative wage or condition to avoid relying on public benefits" (21). Spade repeats many of McGoey's points about unreliable and pointless studies on efficacy, creating tax breaks for the rich, and reinforcing harmful structures and practices:

> Nonprofits are usually run like businesses, with a boss (executive director) at the top deciding things for the people underneath. Nonprofits have the same kinds of problems as other businesses that rely on hierarchical models: drastically unequal pay, race and gender wage gaps, sexual harassment in the workplace, exploitation of workers, and burnout. Despite the fact that they pitch themselves as the solution for fixing the

problems of the current system, nonprofits mostly replicate, legitimize, and stabilize that

system. (2020, 23)

This makes charity a career for some and a hobby for others. But, as Spade says, "activism and

mutual aid shouldn't feel like volunteering or like a hobby—it should feel like living in

alignment with our hopes for the world and with our passions. It should enliven us" (24).

The government can provide aid when it seems beneficial; by providing stimulus checks

and letting people work from home, they were granting accommodations that had been requested

by disability activists. Because the state can take away and grant these sorts of life-saving

resources at a whim, it's important to have that infrastructure continuously. This will be

discussed more in the next section. Spade concisely summarizes the difference between the two:

Mutual aid projects, in many ways, are defined in opposition to the charity model and its

current iteration in the nonprofit sector. Mutual aid projects mobilize lots of people rather

than a few experts; resist the use of eligibility criteria that cut out more stigmatized

people; are an integrated part of our lives rather than a pet cause; and cultivate a shared

analysis of the root causes of the problem and connect people to social movements that

can address these causes. (2020, 24).

4.2.   Capacities of Mutual Aid

I would like to talk more about the concrete effects and actions involved in mutual aid.

By sharing material resources, time, and skills, individuals can meet a lot of the needs within

their communities. We can share material goods like food, clothes, books, technology, and other

things that might alleviate material need. We can also share skills (manual labor, skilled craft,

editing or tutoring, translation services, childcare, and more), time, emotional labor,

transportation, and access to exclusive institutions (libraries, databases, and other private services for members of a closed group). Anything that you can give, share, teach, or do for someone can be mutual aid.

Because there are so many different ways to help others within a community, there are endless ways we can benefit from them as well. If, for example, I provide childcare for a family, perhaps they provide me with transportation. In that situation, we can both meet each other's needs by sharing the skills and resources we have available to us. When communities are able to strengthen these relationships between members, more people can become interdependent.

4.2.1.1. Tulipas do Cerrado

In this section, I will briefly discuss a case of a mutual aid network meeting the needs of a community that was ignored by the state, while simultaneously building solidarity and creating future networks of support. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, when the Brazilian government was giving stimulus checks to help residents get by, President Bolsonaro did nothing to protect sex workers. They were denied these aid packages. There were longstanding mutual aid and support networks that existed in these communities, many beginning during the AIDS crisis. The pre-existing mutual aid network, Tulipas do Cerrado, was able to provide material needs, but also address the stigmatization and systemic inequalities that resulted in their conditions. This community was able to provide material goods, safety, and support when the Brazilian government refused to. Tulipas works with harm reduction, destigmatization, reports of assault, how to cope with addiction, access to health/social/legal services, and protection from and education on the particular risks of being a sex worker.

In a statement from Tulipas, they said "Tulipas' initiative is fundamentally distinct from a paternalistic delivery of essential goods. They actively focus on the creation of spaces for debates and raising awareness while also answering people's most immediate needs [...] Tulipas unconditionally helps confront the ways suffering is imposed on those whom they support" (2020, 645). Because many sex workers had to continue working to survive, they traded information on how to protect themselves from COVID and minimize infection while still working. Because of the long-standing neglect from the state, many communities of sex workers have formed these sorts of support networks: "Tulipas, which confronts stigma while also creating an informal care network, is not an outlier; it reflects a larger trend in sex workers' organizing worldwide. Sex workers have been at the forefront of solidarity and community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, creating emergency funds and mutual aid initiatives" (2020, 651). But these acts of care don't just "fill in the void of public policies," they are acts of "radical solidarity" and care that are necessary for survival (2020, 652).

As discussed before, mutual aid builds solidarity, but it also prompts us to think more about our own involvement in our communities. We spend time building caring relationships with others, not necessarily close ones, but those which work to deepen care networks. This is a different way to look at care work, as discussed in the *Care Manifesto*, written by the Care Collective in 2020 in response to the pandemic. Because of the competitiveness and individuality encouraged by capitalism, we are largely disconnected from our communities: "Neoliberal market exchanges are primarily controlled by extremely powerful marketplace actors that are opaquely interconnected as, globalised and largely reliant on governments for the creation of further 'freed' markets" (2020[8]). This leads us to avoid asking for help or being vulnerable, but that doesn't have to be the case. The Care Collective writes "Only once we acknowledge the

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[8] The version of this text I had did not have stable page numbers, so I am citing the work as a whole.

challenges of our shared dependence, along with our irreducible differences, can we fully value

the skills and resources necessary to promote the capabilities of everyone, whatever our distinct

needs, whether as carers or cared for, noting the frequent reciprocity of these positions" (2020).

However, this doesn't mean that our care must be limited to our immediate communities:

"In the same spirit, we must also care promiscuously. In advocating for promiscuous care, we do

not mean caring casually or indifferently. It is neoliberal capitalist care that remains detached,

both casual and indifferent, with disastrous consequences. For us, promiscuous care is an ethics

that proliferates outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant"

(2020). This is compatible with the global impartiality that Singer discusses in FAM but moves

away from the impersonal style of the EA.

It is also important to note that everyone is valuable, not because of their market value,

but because they are humans. We all have something to contribute to our communities; "Given

our interdependencies, each and every citizen of the caring state must be recognised as having

something of significance and value to contribute at every stage of life. Thus, a transformation of

cultural norms goes hand in hand with the state's avowal of everybody's intrinsic dependency,

with autonomy and dependency seen as two sides of the same coin" (2020).

4.3.   Avoiding the Concerns of Effective Altruism

In my critiques of effective altruism and philanthrocapitalism, I outlined reasons why the

potential harm (or at least, the reasonable concerns for the possibility of harm) outweighs the

claimed benefits of these organizations. I've explained the differences in the goals and

mechanics of mutual aid, and I'd like to address how mutual aid is different from effective

altruism because it avoids these concerns by design.

My primary critique of effective altruist philanthropy is that it exacerbates the systemic conditions that create preventable material need and become the overwhelming source of aid in communities that they dominate. Because mutual aid exists only to meet the needs of a specific community, its goals and methods are flexible and change with shifting needs and priorities. While mutual aid networks consist of people in individual relationships, the actual act of mutual aid necessarily involves delivering some type of benefit. Mutual aid's non-hierarchical structure also avoids the problems of controlling money and resources because it does not rely on corporate top-down decision making. Community members involved in giving and receiving aid all have an equal say in what resources are allocated where.

The goals of mutual aid are significantly different than those of philanthrocapitalism. Because there are no uninvolved 'donors,' there is no reason to show a SROI, as the effective altruist organizations are pressured to do to receive continued funding. Mutual aid aims at more general goals: the continued and reliable welfare of community members, building political solidarity and making concrete steps to combat institutional and systemic inequity. The goal does not include maximizing QALYs; while that might be an effect of the security that comes with support, prioritizing certain projects to maximize QALYs does not fit with the missions of mutual aid. Because mutual aid does not rely on exclusive standards for recipients of aid, it can reach a more indiscriminate group of people. But, since it doesn't control infrastructure (e.g. educational or medical services), it cannot dominate the efforts to address specific causes in the same ways that philanthrocapitalist organizations do. This type of action answers the call to action in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded:* "By trying to do grassroots organizing through this careerist model, we are essentially asking a few people to work more than full-time to make up for the work that needs to be done by millions" (2007, 10).

Because mutual aid has different goals than effective altruism, it does not use the same maximization model that compares different causes to see which can be addressed to secure the most QALYs per dollar. Mutual aid aims to meet localized needs; while many projects aim to combat them, members of support networks don't expect to eradicate preventable needs through funding in the way that effective altruists do. They recognize the systemic conditions that create the conditions and will continue to perpetuate them until the systems are changed or abolished.

Another potential response I had to the effective altruist stance was that they could face some ignorance of the "best" way to operate because of their epistemic limits due to lived experience and geographical proximity. Because these organizations are often run by people who are supplying the funding (like in the case of the Gates foundation) or those who are considered most qualified by having college degrees (Spade 2020, 17), there is a lack of lived experience in the targeted problem in the decision-makers of the organization. Since they don't always employ or consult those who are directly affected, there seems to be an information and experience asymmetry at play. Spade puts it in the following way: "Charity, aid, relief, and social services are terms that usually refer to rich people or the government making decisions about the provision of some kind of support to poor people—that is, rich people or the government deciding who gets the help, what the limits are to that help, and what strings are attached" (20). Also, for international aid organizations, their headquarters are often not based in the communities they are working in, and there is a geographical barrier to being truly connected to community members.

Mutual aid does not have these same flaws built into its structure. The members of the community affected by material needs or conditions that drive them together are necessarily affected, so they know the problems better than any "qualified" candidate. While people outside

of these lived experiences may be included in mutual aid networks, the requests for aid and planning must also involve those affected (43).

Because mutual aid doesn't have the same institutional reach as a charity, it often takes place between individuals. Especially when sharing physical resources and services, there is some geographic proximity required as well. Recall Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's grounded normativity. We are most familiar with those who surround us and inhabit the same, shared land, and are the best informed people to make decisions alongside them. Or, as Andrew Kuper might say, we have more *context* for making decisions that address the roots of need and inequality.

Spade writes:

"Locally operated mutual aid works better for meeting people's needs in all kinds of situations, including disasters, because our needs are best met by those with the most local knowledge, and when we are the ones making the decisions affecting us. Scaling up our mutual aid work means building more and more mutual aid groups, copying each other's best practices, and adapting them to work for particular neighborhoods, subcultures, and enclaves." (2020, 30)

I also responded to the sense of immediacy of effective altruism; I think it's necessary to differentiate these goals between immediate results and urgency. While mutual aid requests are urgent and require immediate action, they are a part of a system that will require continued intention and practice. Such networks create *nets* forged from personal relationships and mutual understanding and goals; they are flexible and durable and can be used in the future for different purposes. They also create pathways of resources that can allow people to disengage from harmful systems that they are forced to rely on. By making a more accessible and equitable source of material and social resources, we focus on the future with care for each other in mind.

There are some possible concerns of mutual aid, which I think are important to mention briefly. One possible problem is co-optation; above, I explained government co-optation of radical politics. By accepting government or private funding, or working in conjunction with an oppressive system (like the state), a radical goal risks being taken over and undermined by the institution. However, that is already an effect of charity and aid, and I think it is a problem that members of mutual aid networks are aware of. Similarly, groups that don't abide by those key tenets of inclusivity and a non-hierarchical arrangement may be at risk for not helping everyone they could, or giving one individual more power than others. Because these networks are composed of individuals who are only accountable to one another, they are fallible systems. However, communication and openness to accountability is a key component of mutual aid and would help combat these possible pitfalls. Another possible concern is one that Alexia Arani outlines in talking about the more mainstream use of mutual aid; these networks are necessary tools for survival. They require serious commitment. If an individual is not committed enough or is inconsistent in their actions, it can become dangerous for others who will lack resources or safety. I think this concern actually encourages us to be *more* involved in mutual aid, though; we have to engage intentionally and carefully, with the well-being and safety of others in mind and a sustainable set of practices that allow us to continue working in this way. I will discuss this more in the following section.

4.4.   What do *we* owe?

Regarding the suggestion of mutual aid as an alternative to charity and aid NGOs, what practices should we adopt to make sure that they address the concerns outlined with effective altruism? For one, it's important to sustain our level of care. Mutual aid requires a stronger

commitment than simply donating to charity; it requires research, building relationships, and often sharing your time. But with these increased demands on one's time and resources, it's imperative to be willing to accept this higher level of commitment.

As Alexia Arani writes in "Mutual Aid and its Ambivalences: Lessons from Sick and Disabled Trans and Queer People of Color," this is a life-sustaining and necessarily lifelong commitment. Mutual aid has been a necessary tool in marginalized communities for a long time; despite its relative popularity during the COVID-19 crisis, many communities have been engaged in taking care of one another outside of the system. So, when people claim they want to help and get involved, an influx of resources can be good, but then failing to uphold that commitment can be very harmful (2020, 661). She highlights the need that existed pre-pandemic, and how aid is often only given (by institutions or individuals) in light of some "exceptional" catastrophe (656), but also makes it seem to those who have relied on these networks in the past that people didn't care enough to help them (658). This widespread co-optation of mutual aid can be good, but it highlights the sort of exclusionary politics that have made aid difficult or impossible to receive in the first place. Mutual aid must be "filling, and not replicating, these gaps" (2020, 661).

So, individuals must be reflective of how they become involved in mutual aid. Some of this might depend on who they are and how much space they take up; it might depend on their intersecting privileges; it might depend on their capacity to share resources and time while maintaining a consistent level of contribution without burnout. As Arani writes,

> Consistency requires intimate self-knowledge, open and honest communication, and
> ongoing conversations about capacity and care—skills that many sick and disabled
> TQPoC have contributed to social justice movements. Disability justice teaches that

consistency is not achieved through saviorism, the patronizing, colonial mindset that a single person or group of people can alleviate all suffering in the world through use of expert knowledge and resources. Rather, consistency requires that we know our limits, how we need to be replenished, and who we can call upon for help. These webs of self and collective care are the beating pulse of mutual aid, that which differentiates this work from humanitarianism and charity and what will ensure our collective survival in the face of endless threats against the lives and livelihoods of sick and disabled, trans, queer, PoC communities. (2020, 661)

This echoes the call to care in *The Care Manifesto;* we need to include care in our daily politics. The 'realist' and cynical individualism encouraged by capitalism is deeply harmful and damages our habits of building caring relationships with community members. The Care Collective writes "Only once we acknowledge the challenges of our shared dependence, along with our irreducible differences, can we fully value the skills and resources necessary to promote the capabilities of everyone, whatever our distinct needs, whether as carers or cared for, noting the frequent reciprocity of these positions" (2020). This returns to the idea that care is lifelong, not only in our commitment to others but in the ways we need to be cared for by them as well. This interdependence and community "insourcing" requires a reflection on what we can all provide as individuals and a community and how much we need to outsource that support to corporations.

One of the most obvious questions in response to the suggestion of mutual aid is to ask what an individual can offer. Our first thought tends to be money, which is, of course, a great resource to share, and one that requires little time and effort to share with others. But, in what I

see, especially among younger people who have little disposable income, people feel like they have nothing to contribute if they don't have money to spare, which isn't the case at all.

As Spade, Arani, and many others have explained, there are many ways to engage in mutual aid besides sharing funds. Of course, daily needs are not just limited to monetary ones. There are many ways people can help to provide others with shelter, food, water, educational and legal services, emotional and medical care, and more. There is no shortage of creative ways that we can meet one another's needs. Resources like time banks, libraries of things, and land banks reconfigure the way we think about our time, possessions, and the land we live on. Detroit is an example of a city where the state infrastructure has failed to meet the needs of many of its inhabitants and the residents of the city have begun to create intricate networks of mutual aid to meet basic needs, plan for the future, and promote healing and well-being in the community (*I Dream Detroit* 2017). Cooperation Jackson is another example of workers and community members sharing resources and democratically redesigning infrastructure to give residents more sovereignty (called "remunicipalism") (*Care Collective,* 2020).

This requires a fundamentally different understanding of what we have to share. When we move outside of the narrow idea of sharing only as sharing money, every person has more to share and more to gain. However, that doesn't settle the question of how *much* we should be giving as individuals.

Effective altruism proposes an imbalanced relationship of giving, between those who are in the position to give and those who can receive. These seem to be set categories for the effective altruist; presumably, if you have enough to give, then you aren't in a position to receive anything. This is different in mutual aid structures—there is no hierarchy of ability to give. Everyone has something to give and something to gain.

However, to return to Singer's earlier suggestions in FAM, we might think about different levels of commitment depending on what one can offer. While Singer recommends the capacity of giving to be set at the maximum that you can spare, the implicit base of mutual aid works against such constraints. If you can give continuously, that's better than short, intense bursts of engagement that lead to burnout and a withdrawal from participation. However, those with more to give can give more, sustainably. A significant aspect of how I understand mutual aid and collective care is *generosity*; I define generosity not in a way that denotes charity, but that you are giving to an extent that feels like a truly significant amount without being burdensome (like Singer's recommendation in FAM to avoid a significant moral sacrifice on our part). Giving a negligible amount of time, money, or effort isn't bad, but it seems to miss part of the point of the *commitment* that is required in mutual aid. It isn't about efficiency or ease like effective altruism touts, but in putting a considerable amount of time, resources, and work into building relationships and forging connections and support networks for the future.

This obligation is very salient to those of us who have privileges that help us meet our daily needs and avoid the obstacles that necessitate mutual aid. I will not be arguing that whiteness and its subsequent generational wealth create financial imbalances between residents of America (and the world in general); I take this to be true and acknowledge the work done by various scholars and activists to make this a granted point in my argument. The systemic financial advantages afforded to white Americans historically and presently make government aid, loans, and family wealth more accessible resources to fall back upon. Even poor white Americans face fewer obstacles in trying to receive aid. This is related to austerity politics enforced by the state, privileging those who have never been incarcerated, defaulted on payments, or any other conditions that render them ineligible for aid.

These systemic and unearned advantages provide many with the resources to share more. However, class stratification and the individualism enforced by capitalism discourage solidarity-building between classes. To hyperbolize, you get effective altruists becoming CEOs who exploit their workers and the land to earn more to give more, and the people who require aid only miles away who never see this aid and meet their own needs outside the reach of the state. So, for people who have access to systemic advantages for whatever reasons, they have access to these advantages to share.[9] You can become a guarantor for a loan, help others gain admittance to exclusive institutions (and share the resources afforded by those institutions to those who can't join), and share inherited wealth or land. This requires more involvement than simply donating $25 to a charity every month, but it is an active way to address and counteract systemic privilege.

Of course, different people have different capacities for what they have to offer. Many of my peers in college are trying to pay their own tuition, save up for a place to live afterwards, or don't have a reliable source of income. If that's the case, they still have ways to be involved in mutual aid in their community. One way to be more intentional about monetary aid is setting a weekly or monthly budget; it should be a sustainable amount, even if it's not a lot, that they can commit to every week. Social media has been important in sharing monetary requests for aid; people can repost mutual aid asks on their social media platforms, whether or not they are personally able to donate. Then, even if they cannot contribute monetarily, they still contribute in sharing the request with a wider audience, increasing the likelihood of reaching someone who is in a better position to help. They could also invest other resources that don't cost money into their communities: they could share educational materials from their institution, like those guarded by paywalls; provide translation services; give transportation to community members; or

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[9] I acknowledge, again, that this is by no means an original thought or suggestion. These routes of community care have been long suggested by activists, especially people of color, who have pointed out what I say here.

pick up groceries for them. They don't have to be intense commitments; it's likely there are ways you can incorporate mutual aid into your already existing routines.

The important thing to remember in getting involved in mutual aid is that you are working on building community. You are not anonymous donors out for a tax break; you are joined by some common belief that everyone should have their needs met and that we all have the responsibility to share what we can.

4.5.   What do we imagine for the future?

My recommendations reflect my disillusionment with charity, nationalism, and capitalism, but I understand that not everyone shares these values with me. It is abundantly clear that the systems in place do not support everyone equally, and I think that, regardless of what political beliefs one holds, this is not an ideal characteristic of any state. So, to align our views and goals with our future, there needs to be certain use of imagination and practiced political action that is necessary to reach a point where there are more accessible routes for meeting people's needs.

Of course, applying mutual aid is not a sufficient action to stop neoimperialism, neoliberalism, and other harmful mechanisms that fail to help marginalized communities (Tully 2008, 130). However, less reliance on the state, and especially on international charities that are run by rich foreigners with no lived experience or familiarity with the communities they insert themselves into, could help make these lasting imperial relationships less binding. In *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, James Tully writes of imperialist ethics:

   The moral and rational capacities of 'lower peoples' are less developed than the
   universalising rationalists and moralists at the higher stage. The person who adopts this

meta-narrative, as Kant's pupil Johann Herder put it in response, cannot approach another

people's way of life as an alternative horizon, thereby throwing their own into question

and experiencing human finitude and plurality, the beginning of insight and cross-cultural

understanding. (2008, 149)

By continuing structural harm and undermining communities' abilities to operate without state or

charity guidance, effective altruists are guilty of what Tully identifies as a failure to recognize

another's agency and capability (echoing Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's points). As pointed

out by INCITE! and Dean Spade, state aid and private charities can direct and channel resources

to control marginalized communities. Tully writes,

If subaltern peoples and Indigenous peoples could only exercise their right of

self-determination, through international law and reform of the UN or through revolution

and liberation, they would free themselves from European and American imperialism[...]

The protection of self-determination and democratic government under international law

and the exercise of powers of self-determination and democratic self-rule are internal to

informal post-colonial imperialism, at least in their present form. They are literally the

two main ways by which the conduct of subaltern states is governed by informal imperial

rule: that is, through supporting, channelling and constraining their self-determining and

democratic freedoms. (2008, 152-3).

Consequently, it seems like this movement away from state and corporation-controlled resource

allocation is crucial to building genuine relationships and solidarity with other people, both

domestically and internationally. By moving away from the hierarchy-dependent aid mechanisms

and towards horizontal, mutually dependent and cooperative mechanisms, the power and

resource imbalance that exists as a result of colonialism and capitalism can be addressed and

assessed by those involved. As Kuper writes in his response to "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," we need to make sure to act contextually and with an understanding of consequences (as much as is possible due to our epistemic limits).

4.6.   Practical recommendations

So, what do my points demand of my reader? Of course, I don't presume to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to aid anyone. But I do encourage critically approaching where we spend our time and resources. We must consider how our actions uphold or work against institutions that harm ourselves and others.

The one undeniable conclusion I make is that we should not view effective altruism as the epitome of generosity and philanthropy. Through this thesis, I worked to clearly outline the deviance from "good" enacted by effective altruism, and that encouraging these practices generates more harm and incentivizes further harm at the expense of others. I would recommend the reader to research mutual aid in their area; a quick online search can help you find local ways to get involved. Even if you feel like there are no organizations that you can be involved with locally, being able to share resources over the internet is a great way to seek out mutual aid for specific groups or in response to particular conditions.

I would ask the reader to reflect on their own imaginative resistance to different ways the future could look. If it seems difficult to imagine giving time during your week to a time bank or giving up a vacation to help others fund necessities, I invite you to sit in that tension and ask yourself why. Ask yourself what you want the future to look like, how you want your part in that to look, and whether or not you feel comfortable with how that aligns with your routine actions.

I would ask the reader to consider their community. Who are you in community with? Are there certain people who are excluded from your circles? How can you expand your relationships outside of your immediate community and pluralize your idea of the world? How can you sustainably and intentionally be involved in your community? Thankfully, there is no shortage of guides of resources on how to become more involved in mutual aid in your community and the world. I will not claim to be an expert in these but know they are easy to find and share with your community. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney say in *The Undercommons*, we are in debt to one another. This is not a debt that should be calculated or repaid, but it ties us to one another and creates responsibility and duty to care for each other (2013).

Mutual aid is not a replacement for charity; it employs completely different moral values of dependence and solidarity over philanthropy and evaluations of worthiness. It is a tool that exists and sustains life independent of (and sometimes despite) state and private corporations' attitudes towards people. By providing everyone with the resources they need to survive without being beholden to any state or austerity politics, people gain access to the resources necessary to plan for the future.

5.   Conclusion

In writing this thesis, I have been constantly reflecting upon what my goals are and why *I* felt the need to write about this. As a white college student from the United States, I hold a lot of privilege in how I move throughout the world. However, I believe there are many other students at Mount Holyoke and beyond who have also been taught that contributing to charity is the best way to help others, a message I contend is harmful. I wanted to bring this topic into discussion at my institution and, hopefully, others, to shift the discussion around giving. So, while there is a range of takeaways a reader could draw from this thesis, I want to make clear the ends of that spectrum. *My weak claim is that there are sufficient concerns about effective altruism and that we should reconsider its status as the "best" way to do good in the world. My strong claim is that effective altruism has proven harmful effects, and that to continue to encourage and support it is to commit a moral wrongdoing; this stance also includes the same directive of FAM, but posits that mutual aid is the best way to prevent material needs and help prevent need in the future as well.* Even those who disagree with my stronger claim may still agree with my weaker claim.

I hope to have proven that, because we do not know the best course of action to stop global poverty, there is no *one* certain way. However, the concerns I have raised about effective altruism should be convincing enough to at least prompt reflection. I believe that these costs, even if just possible ones, are too high considering the continued systemic damage they cause. This is especially significant because mutual aid does not pose these same dangers at all. Contrarily, it counteracts them while providing much of the same assistance. Mutual aid works against systemic injustice while meeting the material needs of community members. It does not discriminate against more expensive courses of action, and members of the mutual aid network

care for one another regardless of whether or not it seems worth the investment. Because mutual aid groups require community and sometimes geographic proximity, they don't have the same wide-scale potential for damage as EA aid organizations do. But, because of the community and solidarity created by mutual aid, they also create emotional and political support while securing agency for affected people while avoiding hierarchy and corporate structures.

Mutual aid also fulfills our duty to vision because it actively reshapes how communities' needs are met as it's done, simultaneously meeting immediate needs and creating new paths to provide resources in the future. The more that people can rely on their communities for support, the less they will have to rely on organizations that do not deliver regular aid.

I believe that mutual aid is fully compatible with the conclusion of FAM; it sounds very similar to the reciprocal altruism Singer writes about in *A Darwinian Left* and appeals to his call to "change the pay-off[s] so cheats do not prosper" (1999, 52). I think that mutual aid is a much less dangerous way to meet the immediate need and fulfill our duties outlined in FAM without necessarily replicating the harm that is inherent in EA. It also creates avenues for a future where people can reintroduce care into their politics and relearn how to care promiscuously and proceed carefully into a future where everyone is provided for.

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