

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/144726>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

The Most Good We Can Do or The Best Person We Can Be?

Michel Bourban & Lisa Broussois

This is the accepted manuscript of an article published in *Ethics, Policy & Environment* (<https://doi.org/10.1080/21550085.2020.1848175>)

Abstract

We challenge effective altruism (EA) on the basis that it should be more inclusive regarding the demands of altruism. EA should consider carefully agents' intentions and the role those intentions can play in agents' moral lives. Although we argue that good intentions play an instrumental role and can lead to better results, by adopting a Hutchesonian perspective, we show that intentions should, first and foremost, be considered for their intrinsic value. We examine offsetting and geoengineering, two so-called solutions to climate change supported by EA, to highlight the limitations of a narrow understanding of altruism.

Keywords

Effective Altruism; Hutcheson; Moral sense; Benevolence; Climate Change; Ethics of Offsetting; Ethics of Geoengineering

Distrust those cosmopolitans who go to great length in their books to discover duties they do not deign to fulfill around them. A philosopher loves the Tartars so as to be spared having to love his neighbors.

(Rousseau, 1979, p. 39)

1. Introduction

Effective altruism (EA) is an exciting new philosophical and social movement that gives concrete and practical guidance to help people to act ethically. While altruism here ‘simply means improving the lives of others’ (MacAskill, 2015, p. 12), effectiveness consists in doing the most good with whatever resources we have. For instance, people can give 10% of their income to best-performing aid and development organizations, as recommended by meta-charities such as GiveWell or Giving What We Can. The movement is successfully directing millions of dollars to charities that have demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing extreme poverty (Singer, 2015, p. vii), such as the Against Malaria Foundation with its distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets in malaria zones or GiveDirectly with its direct cash transfers to impoverished people (Berkey, 2018, p. 147).

EA is based on widely accepted principles that many people are likely to find convincing. It appears, indeed, to square reasonably well with basic moral intuitions, when it argues that ‘[I]iving a fully ethical life involves doing the most good we can’ (Singer, 2015, p. vii; 2016c, p. 132). EA asks ‘How can I make the biggest difference I can?’ and uses ‘evidence and careful reasoning to try to find an answer’ by taking ‘a scientific approach to doing good’ (MacAskill, 2015, p. 11). In concrete terms, EA asks us to make choices about giving money to charities, opting for a career or volunteering opportunity, or buying or not buying goods according to what has the biggest positive impact (MacAskill, 2015, p. 14). Having the biggest positive impact, in terms of money that you can give, might imply choosing a morally controversial career (MacAskill, 2014).

Doing the most good one can is intuitively a compelling ethical principle. However, by focusing on the consequences of our actions, for instance by asking us to

embrace an ethically problematic career path in order to earn more and then to give more, EA perhaps neglects to take into account the kind of person we want to be and what kind of difference that might make. It seems to us that there is room for discussion here. As we understand it, the logic of EA could imply that, in certain circumstances, we should let go of some of our moral integrity and maybe go against our moral feelings in order to ‘make the biggest difference,’ especially in monetary terms. It could also imply that moral integrity is secondary and that the nature of our motives and intentions do not really matter because what is most important is to be as effective as possible, regardless of the kind of person we want to be.¹

With this in mind, although we admire the work of the founders of this new movement, we disagree with some elements of their approach, from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. Paradoxically, in order to live what Peter Singer calls a ‘fully ethical life,’ we are not sure that *doing the most good we can* is sufficiently demanding. While some criticize EA for being too demanding,² we think, on the contrary, that it sometimes omits a crucial ethical component: Being an altruistic person also involves focusing on *the kind of person we want to be*. Of course, we are not saying that effective altruists are never *good* or *virtuous* people or that they do not have *good intentions* when they choose the action that will have the biggest impact. Most probably do. We simply have some concerns about the effects of focusing so much on the best outcomes and not so much on the people who act and how they could be led to ignore or deceive their moral sense. In other words, our concern is about taking what it means to be an altruist in the expression ‘effective altruism’ seriously, otherwise there is a danger of too much focus on what it is to *be effective* and not enough on what it is to *be altruistic*. This last consideration is inherent to the question of how we ought to live.

We believe that our moral intuitions do not only lead us to act with a view to the best possible outcomes, they also require us to be good people living virtuous lives.

Our objective is to highlight and discuss possible limitations to EA. It is not our intention to discredit the movement and the very impressive results it has already achieved, but rather to enrich the discussion by considering the importance of defining more clearly what it means to be altruistic and how a better understanding of the meaning of altruism could be helpful in enriching our insight into our ethical life. Drawing on the eighteenth-century moral philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, we explain why it is crucial to keep in mind the kind of person we want to be while trying to do the most good we can and the need to focus on both intentions and outcomes to live ‘a fully ethical life.’ We further argue that, even if we adopt the utilitarian perspective of EA, we do need to focus on intentions if we want to achieve the best outcomes. And it may not be enough to focus on intentions for their instrumental value, as utilitarians tend to do, without also considering their intrinsic value. By exploring offsetting and geoengineering, two responses to climate change supported by some effective altruists, we show that when people are too preoccupied with doing the most good they can, they risk sacrificing other considerations required by altruism, in allowing themselves to ignore and/or deceive their moral sense.

This is why we believe EA needs to be challenged. However, our purpose is not to reject EA altogether, but simply to raise some ethical issues that, taken seriously, could help to improve the movement as a whole.

2. Effective Altruism and Moral Sense: Are We the Best People We Can Be?

EA is based on the idea that, when we do the most good we can, we should consider justice and other moral norms to matter only insofar as they lead to the best

consequences. They do not matter intrinsically. As Jennifer Rubenstein (2016, p. 513–514) stresses, EA is ‘a philosophy and movement that focuses on consequences’ and that is ‘most closely associated with utilitarianism.’ EA’s aim is to ensure that people succeed in having the greatest positive impact they can (MacAskill, 2015, p. 5). The ‘overriding concern’ (Singer, 2015, p. 5) is to do the most good we can.

In contrast, we argue that the nature of intentions that motivate moral agents could make a crucial ethical difference and should not be underestimated. We show the importance of ‘a fully ethical life’ also being valued in relation to the intentions behind our actions. In order to do this, we argue that focusing on intentions only in relation to their instrumental value may not be the best way to proceed to become an altruistic person; we might have to focus on the intrinsic value of our intentions first to become the best person we can be (a truly altruistic one), and only then could we have adequate means to attain the best results. According to our Hutchesonian perspective, virtue is the best way to achieve the best results. Yet we cannot evaluate the cultivation of virtue only in the light of the production of the best results, because the cultivation of virtue, even if it could later lead to the best results, is at first separated from any consequentialist consideration. In other words, our thesis is that virtue can be effectively instrumentalized only if we first recognize its intrinsic value.

2.1. Earning More to Give More?

Effective altruists may be people who earn a lot of money in order to give some of it to top charities.³ When faced with a career choice, they tend to choose the most lucrative, in order to get more money for their philanthropic actions. William MacAskill explains that the most altruistic careers are not, as often assumed, careers in social work or charity work. Rather, they are typically ‘morally innocuous’ careers (careers with no

strong non-consequentialist reason against pursuing them) within engineering, pharmacy, and private medicine, and often ‘morally controversial’ careers (careers with at least a strong non-consequentialist reason against pursuing them) within petrochemical companies, the arms industry, and sometimes within finance and involving food speculation. Morally controversial careers tend to be more lucrative than morally innocuous ones, which makes them often ethically preferable from the perspective of EA (MacAskill, 2014, p. 270).

One example MacAskill gives is someone who chooses to work for a petrochemical company that substantially contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions instead of working for a charity contributing to the fight against climate change. Thanks to her high income, this person would give a lot of money to top charities, thereby helping more people than she would have if she had worked for a charity. Even if she has ‘a deep moral commitment to caring about other people and the environment,’ it would be a mistake for her not to work for a petrochemical company: If she did not, someone else would take her place and earn the money without giving it to charities (MacAskill 2014, p. 279).

This kind of career path might be considered efficient, in that it contributes to giving substantial proportions of earnings to top charities. However, we have serious doubts that it can be considered altruistic. If earning a lot of money in order to give some of it away is sufficient to live ethically, EA does not seem to be sufficiently based on altruism. Unlike MacAskill (2015, p. 12), we do not understand altruism simply as improving the lives of others, but also as having a minimum level of care for others, including those who would sacrifice their moral feelings to choose morally repulsive career paths.

A first concern is that EA encourages altruistic people to work for companies that contribute to global injustices by claiming they are living ethically because of their donations to charities. In doing so, there is a high risk of losing people who want to be altruistic, in the name of pursuing effectiveness at all costs. EA pushes them to enter a system that promotes completely different values from those it supports in the first place. The objective of petrochemical companies is not in any way about improving the lives of others. It is easy for people to be corrupted in this kind of ethically repulsive career path, especially if they are well paid. People who were initially altruistic may also lose their way and become depressed or discouraged.

Moreover, by choosing this kind of career path, the message effective altruists send can be interpreted as supportive of the harmful economic world order and the very institutions that are partly responsible for the poverty we are supposed to fight (Pogge, 2008). From this point of view, someone could give substantial amounts of money to the global poor and, at the same time, keep impoverishing them by his contribution to unjust global institutions, thus trying to relieve people from the poverty he is complicit in maintaining.

Another worry is that EA may also represent an opportunity for some to follow a new trend and create a good public image. According to supporters of EA, it is possible to be as rich as Bill Gates, and to live a fully ethical life at the same time, as long as we give a small percentage of our tens of billions (Singer, 2015, p. 50). We are not saying that effective altruists have immoral motives or only consider their own interests when they act. Rather, we feel that EA, as defined by MacAskill and Singer, leaves open the crucial question of the nature and importance of the intentions of those who give money to charities. An action based on selfish motives or an action that could lead to an altruistic person turning her back on her moral feelings, as long as it leads to

excellent results, for instance in monetary terms, would not be questioned. In our perspective, altruism goes beyond considerations of effectiveness to encompass broader considerations on our character traits and the nature and importance of our intentions.

This perspective is actually not that far from Singer's early writings, in which he seemed to have a more complete conception of the demands of altruism. He once wrote that the way we looked at moral issues had to change, 'and with it, the way of life that [had] come to be taken for granted in our society' (Singer, 1972, p. 230). By encouraging people to earn more in order to give more, EA does not demand changes in our lifestyles. Singer further acknowledged that there are some 'attitudes that have done irreparable damage to the environment of our planet' (Singer, 2011, p. ix). These attitudes are connected to the quest for the most lucrative short-term results. It is one thing to claim that people should do the most good they can, quite another to tell them they should aim for maximum profits and then give a certain amount of their income to charities. Yet, effective altruists risk fostering confusion between the two. The problem is knowing whether it is more desirable for a society to be made up of people mainly concerned with their effectiveness or truly altruistic people, who also consider their character traits important, and whether it makes a difference. We think it does.

The major reason why we think that EA may be missing a crucial part of our ethical life is due to its narrow understanding of altruism. We need to determine whether or not we can be altruistic without radically changing dominant lifestyles and ways of thinking. It is not enough to give some of our money to top charities if we continue the same lifestyles that cause climate change, global poverty, and other global injustices. Giving a high percentage of our incomes to charities and then rebalancing our budgets by buying cheaper clothes made by enslaved children in poor countries and

meat from factory farms producing high GHG emissions is inconsistent. All aspects of our everyday lives are included in the balance and most of our decisions matter. Being altruistic means that we do not want to contribute to a system that harms other sentient beings, and these considerations guide our everyday lives, not just the two minutes per month when we make our tax-deductible online financial transfer to charities. This is why our actions need to be guided by constant involvement, which may lead, for instance, to a stronger commitment to defend women's, children's, and non-human animals' rights, and so on. It is not altruistic to act on one front without considering other fronts, otherwise we might contribute to harming vulnerable beings. This kind of commitment is not easy to honor, and we need the best reasons to stand firm.

2.2. Intentions Matter in Themselves

To understand better what it means to be truly altruistic, we propose drawing on Francis Hutcheson's philosophy of moral sense. Hutcheson's is not necessarily the right or the best philosophy; we just want to offer another perspective on what being an effective altruist might involve.

Why refer to Hutcheson rather than a classical figure such as Aristotle or Kant, who also explained why intentions matter, morally speaking? First, Aristotle and Kant are already very well known, while the same cannot be said about Hutcheson, a philosopher whom, we believe, deserves much more attention in regard to moral and political thinking. Hutcheson's philosophy of moral sense still has the potential to enrich our understanding of our moral life and provide crucial elements in a reappraisal and questioning of what we often take for granted in the Western classical tradition of philosophy. It would be a mistake to consider Hutcheson as a lower-ranking philosopher instead of seriously trying to understand what made his writings so relevant

and allowed him to have a great influence on many of our major thinkers of modern philosophy, including Hume, Smith, Reid and Kant.⁴

Second, Hutcheson has the decided advantage of being close, both historically and intellectually, to the tradition of utilitarianism on which EA draws, which is not true of Aristotle's ancient virtue ethics or Kant's modern deontological ethics. Hutcheson's philosophy paves the way for an internal criticism of the utilitarian foundation of EA. Hutcheson was not, strictly speaking, a utilitarian, but he was the first to coin the formula of 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number' (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 164), before Mill and Bentham.⁵ Although utility plays a central role in his political theory, by integrating a virtue ethics into his approach, he was also very much aware of the crucial role that intentions play in morality.⁶ In other words, even if the consequences of our actions mattered to him, Hutcheson considered that there was another crucial element to consider when it came to our moral lives, and he considered that, as long as this element was not taken seriously into account, the chances of obtaining the best results were very slight.

Hutcheson (1725, p. 178) argued that 'no external circumstances of fortune, no involuntary disadvantages [could] exclude any mortal from the most heroic virtue.' What he meant can be illustrated with a simple example. Imagine a poor and hungry man who would share his only piece of bread with another poor and hungry man. Would he be a virtuous man? From a Hutchesonian perspective, he would be far more virtuous than the billionaire who shares 10% of his (declared) income to fight global poverty. The reason being that the degree of virtue is not just a matter of good results; it is also related to the intention and the capacities of the person who acts. The billionaire with his money could *do 'more' good* than the poor man because he could save more lives. However, the poor man could *be more virtuous* than the billionaire because he does

everything he can do and acts with the best intentions. Hutcheson would agree that the more you can do, the better, but he would not agree that the richer you are, the more altruistic you can be.

This perspective clearly contrasts with that which claims it is ethically preferable to earn more money and pursue philanthropy through a higher paid but morally controversial career than to earn less money through an ethical career path in the charity sector (MacAskill, 2014, p. 270). EA supporters would probably agree that a poorer person could be more virtuous than a richer person. However, given their utilitarian perspective on altruism, they would not agree that a poor person, thanks to her virtue alone, could be more altruistic than a rich person. The conceptual problem is that being altruistic for EA implies being effective more than being virtuous, but it doesn't take the same character traits for a rich man to give 10% of his income and for a poor man to share his bread when it is the only thing he has. Furthermore, because it would be more demanding for the poor man than for the rich man to give, the former would be likely to develop more altruistic character traits than the latter.

In our Hutchesonian perspective, as we will see below, virtue and altruism cannot be separated. Virtue is clearly not just related to results.⁷ Our capacities may be meager, but our efforts to do the most good can be tremendous. In truth, if we are genuinely virtuous, our efforts to do the most good will be substantial. With this in mind, EA should not be used as an excuse to support the idea that results matter more than the best intentions. We need strong motivation to act and do the most good we can do in relation to our capacities. In the Hutchesonian account we develop here, this strong motivation would be virtue – or, more precisely, benevolence. If EA only insists on the best results, then people could choose to act without trying to be virtuous.

A crucial point in our reasoning about the limits of EA is that our integrity as moral agents matters. A low-impact action based on virtuous motives should be undertaken, because it would say something about the agent's integrity. Our actions are indicative of who we are and the virtues we endorse. In his defense of morally objectionable career paths introduced above, MacAskill asks: 'If one is concerned about climate change, as a deep project of one's, isn't it a bizarre violation of one's moral integrity to then work for a petrochemical company, so that one can fund climate change mitigation projects?' (MacAskill, 2014, p. 278). His answer is that there are two instances where there is no violation of integrity. The first is when prospective workers have no deep moral commitments that conflict with ethically controversial careers or simply have no deep moral commitments at all (MacAskill, 2014, p. 279). Our objection is that, in this case, the prospective workers would clearly not be altruistic, as being so would require having deep moral commitments in the first place.

MacAskill's second instance where there is no violation of integrity is when moral commitments are based on error or miscalculation (MacAskill, 2014, p. 279–80). He illustrates this idea with the example of a climate change campaigner. If she has a commitment that is incompatible with working in a petrochemical company, based on caring about other people and the environment, she is mistaken in thinking that working for a charity will be a more efficient contribution to tackling climate change. The best way to fulfill her commitment to mitigating climate change is to earn more in order to give more to top charities, even if working for such a company would 'feel like a violation of [her] integrity' (MacAskill, 2014, p. 280). We would object here that if she feels she is violating her integrity, she risks weakening or even losing the character traits that made her an altruistic person in the first place. If she doesn't lose her altruism, she risks unbearable suffering that could lead to burnout. Asking her to join a

community of like-minded people or to visit the projects her charitable donations have funded to avoid such burnout, as MacAskill (2014, p. 281) suggests, is not enough: The point is not only to avoid burnout, but to preserve our integrity and, thereby, our moral sense.

2.3. Moral Sense and Benevolence

Hutcheson assumed that everyone had moral sense. Moral sense is a faculty we use to determine whether what we or other people are doing is good or right, for no other reason than that we feel *it is* the right thing to do (regardless of the material consequences of our actions). Moral sense is an internal sense – a human faculty characterized by sensibility to the idea of virtue and vice – a natural reaction to what seems good or bad. It is not the product of belief or reason, it is an immediate and intuitive reaction of pleasure and approbation to the idea of being a good person and doing good to others. Hutcheson described moral sense as a ‘determination’ of the mind ‘to approve every kind affection either in our selves or others’ and to approve ‘all publickly useful actions’ derived from such affection (Hutcheson, 1728, p. 211). His point was not to prove that people had moral sense; Hutcheson said that moral sense was something people should directly be able to experience in their everyday lives and he wanted to understand the implications of this faculty on our moral lives.

In Hutcheson’s view, moral sense approves the honest and impartial attempt to be the best person possible, that is to say the attempt to be capable of truly caring about the interests of other people. As he suggested:

Suppose we reap the same advantage from two men, one of which serves us from delight in our happiness, and love toward us; the other from views of self-interest, or by constraint: both are in this case equally beneficial or advantageous to us, and yet we shall have quite

different sentiments of them. We must then certainly have other perceptions of moral actions than those of advantage. (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 109)

Hutcheson explained that even if the two men were both acting equally advantageously and both served us, we would admire and love (esteem) the first man who acted with good intentions toward us and we would never esteem nor admire the second man, even if his action had the same consequences. Why? Hutcheson considered that because of our moral sense, intentions mattered.

Now, what are these kind affections moral sense would approve of? Hutcheson's (1725, p. 143–45) approach to moral motivation was to consider that benevolence was a natural tendency of human beings to love others, to be interested in their true good, and to act for the realization of their happiness through publicly useful actions. Benevolence is a generic virtue that motivates us to act for the good of others without considering our own selfish private interests. Benevolence is what we would define today as *pure altruism*. It comes from the best intentions and we know it is right because it is what our moral sense would approve of. This natural determination can be encouraged and become strong enough to go beyond personal interests. Benevolence represents the 'kind affections' or, more generically, the virtue of the good person who is ready to equate his/her interests with those of others so that he/she can recognize them as being of equal importance. Benevolence provides motivation to defend the interests of others as an aim in itself and not because it gives us self-satisfaction or improves our public image.

Hutcheson believed that even if people ought to act to maximize what would serve the majority, that was not the sole criterion: 'Here also the moral importance of characters, or dignity of persons may compensate numbers; as may also the degrees of

happiness or misery' (Hutcheson 1725, p. 164). The effectiveness and the righteousness of our actions needed to be considered in the light of multiple criteria. However, these criteria could not serve if we were not open and sensitive to what was happening in the world around us, near and far. Only the best intentions could give us the necessary sensibility to take into account all the different aspects.

Hutcheson conceded that humans tended to be selfish, especially when society encouraged them to be so. We cannot expect people to become truly altruistic all of a sudden. However, we can expect them to make the effort to question their intentions and why they want to be effective altruists, in order that they might gradually become better people. They can try to act with benevolence and to change the world by caring about other humans and sentient beings. Hutcheson also recognized that there were different degrees of benevolence: 'There are some nearer and stronger degrees of benevolence, when the objects stand in some nearer relations to ourselves' (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 195). Our benevolence tends to be stronger when it concerns people close to us, so it is important not to neglect the good that this stronger benevolence can do, because it could produce a greater degree of happiness for the people around us. Benevolence needs to be extended to the maximum, but it is still important in small circles.

Why is it so important to act benevolently and gain the approval of our moral sense? For the simple reason that the human condition in Hutcheson's time and today are not so different. Many of the major ethical problems we face are caused or worsened by ignorance of or indifference to the fate of others. From a Hutchesonian perspective, we should try to become the best person we can be, with the most virtuous intentions in our daily lives before trying to do good better, to act efficiently. For, if effective

altruists do not act with benevolence, then their ethical life may be lacking a crucial component.

2.4. Intentions Matter from a Consequentialist Perspective

Although the issue of reasons to act mattered in itself, Hutcheson believed it was not totally disconnected from the issue of the best means for the best results. De facto, if EA considers that ‘good intentions can all too easily lead to bad outcomes’ (MacAskill, 2015, p. 5), it is also true that bad intentions can potentially be disastrous and that, sometimes, apparently good outcomes create bad side effects. We do not want to argue that selfish intentions are always bad,⁸ but that benevolent people are never satisfied with apparently good results, whereas selfish people often are. As we explain above, trying to be a good person with the best intentions is at least as important as trying to act efficiently. Here, we add that being good by living virtuously is even one of the best guarantees of doing the most good we can. Now, EA could recognize the instrumental value of virtue (although they do not say much about this), but the point here is to go a step further and to look at the particular relation developed by Hutcheson between the intrinsic and the instrumental values of virtue.

Hutcheson's famous formula of ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’ did not mean, for him, that only the best consequences mattered. He argued that only moral principles could lead to the maximization of happiness for the greatest number. The best results implied the best intentions (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 276). Hutcheson believed that there was a connection between the best intentions of a moral agent and the best results of an action. He took for granted that there was a deity in the universe and that this deity ensured that, generally, benevolence led to the best outcomes. He wrote, ‘The best state of rational agents, and their greatest and most worthy happiness, we are

necessarily led to imagine must consist in universal efficacious benevolence’ (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 276). Without endorsing Hutcheson’s idea of a deity, we can easily recognize that this connection would intuitively make sense, insofar as we can assume that people with the best intentions are probably those willing to make the greatest efforts to change and/or create a change in favor of justice, care, and more wellbeing for all. It is basically the difference in result we can expect between people who do and people who do not really care about others. Following this logic, our assessment would be that those likely to get the better results are those who are more virtuous, because they truly want to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The ‘will’ to do good should thus be the first consideration before the ‘capacity’ to do good.

Henry Sidgwick (1907, p. 424), who inspired Singer in his account of EA (2015, p. 81–3), also considered that there was ‘a great difference between the assertion that virtue is always productive of happiness, and the assertion that the right action is under all circumstances that which produces the greatest possible happiness on the whole.’ This distinction seems to echo Hutcheson’s. With this view, virtue can never be reduced solely to the production of happiness. A good result does not make a person virtuous, but the virtuous person is likely to produce the better result because she has the strongest will to accomplish the changes that are necessary for the world to become a better place. This is what Hutcheson meant when he mentioned ‘universal efficacious benevolence.’

However, there is an important distinction we need to stress. While both Hutcheson and Sidgwick link virtue to the greatest possible happiness, they do not do so in exactly the same way. According to Sidgwick (1907, p. 402), ‘conduciveness to general happiness should be the criterion for deciding how far the cultivation of Virtue should be carried.’ In contrast, for Hutcheson the criterion related to the cultivation of virtue

is moral sense, because it connects us to the approval of virtue. We cannot cultivate benevolence in isolation from our moral approbation, and our moral sense approves any attempt or desire to do good regardless of the results. Benevolence consists as much in a desire and a determination of the will to do the greatest good, as in the actualization of the greatest good. This is why, ‘we approve generous attempts, tho’ unsuccessful,’ because intentions matter at least as much as results. Results or utility alone do not determine our moral approbation: ‘we equally approve the virtues or generous designs of good men in former ages toward their contemporaries, or in the remotest nations, toward their countrymen, (...) as if the like were done to our friends, or country’ (Hutcheson, 1755, p. 53). In other words, we sometimes approve what is of no use to us; we even approve something that cannot produce any new result because we recognize the intrinsic value of virtue and the difference it makes even if it does not always produce a maximization of happiness.

When we look at our world as it stands, Hutcheson seems to be right inasmuch as perhaps we might not have reached this point, where the future does not seem so bright, and we would have achieved better results if we had made the effort to act first with more benevolence. Bill and Melinda Gates suggest that ‘[t]he world has improved dramatically in the more than forty years that have passed since Singer wrote “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”’ (Singer, 2016a, p. vii). According to what criterion? Can we say, for example, that people are now better persons than they used to be forty years ago? Even if people earn and give more money, it is not certain that they are more concerned about the wellbeing of other humans and sentient beings and other living entities on the planet. It is not certain that we meet more altruistic or benevolent people in the streets. Maybe a smaller percentage of the world’s population die of poverty, but at the same time, we have been aware for more than thirty years that we are actively

and rapidly altering the ecological life-support system for all forms of life on the planet with our high-emitting and polluting lifestyles which disrupt the climate system and the integrity of the biosphere. Yet, global GHG emissions reach a new record every passing year. Can we honestly call this a dramatic improvement?

When we look at all the serious ethical problems we have to deal with in our current situation, it is far from certain that effective people without benevolence represent the best solution. If we look at what has been done so far, even by effective altruists, we are far from the best results we could expect of truly moral agents. We may well be self-satisfied (an attitude that is certainly not in short supply), but it is difficult to be satisfied with the world as it stands. We have neglected for too long the ethical importance of the kind of people we want to be and the benefits that virtue could bring to our societies. Hutcheson's philosophy could, in many ways, be understood as an early warning in relation to the direction our societies were about to take in the early eighteenth century and the necessity to be vigilant regarding that. Now that our societies have evolved in the directions of individualism, egoism, and egocentrism, we should be able to recognize that it is time for us to change the way we think about what a 'fully ethical life' means. One way to do this is to listen to ancient echoes and try to understand what we have missed.

3. Effective Altruism and Climate Change: Are Offsetting and Geoengineering Really Altruistic?

Let us now turn to a more practical question in order to illustrate our point about people focusing too much on what it is to *be effective* and not enough on what it is to *be altruistic*. We highlight here some possible limitations to EA's recommendations regarding the fight against climate change. We show how lack of consideration for

intentions can easily lead to too much haste when it comes to supporting dangerous and suspect ‘easy solutions’ in order to solve complex problems caused by us in the first place.

We use our Hutchesonian account to think about the ethics of offsetting and of geoengineering. We argue that these courses of action would certainly not be those a truly altruistic person would choose to fight against climate change. They are, however, the two main courses of actions put forward by effective altruists. Both are presented as cheap responses to the climate problem that do not require direct reduction in GHG emissions, and therefore do not demand changes in high-emitting lifestyles.

3.1. Altruistic Offsetting?

Consider first offsetting. MacAskill suggests the following course of action: ‘rather than reducing your own greenhouse gas emissions, you pay for projects that reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere’ (MacAskill, 2015, p. 137). Instead of cutting your emissions by reducing your intake of meat, the amount you travel, and your use of electricity, you can give money to Cool Earth, a charity that protects rainforests, a major carbon sink: \$105/year would be enough to do your bit in the fight against global warming (MacAskill, 2015, p. 140). That is, if you are an American: If you are Canadian, European, Chinese, or Indian, you don’t even have to pay that much. Along the same lines, John Broome (2012, p. 90, 45) writes, ‘offsetting is remarkably cheap’, so cheap that ‘it is possible in principle to cure the externality of greenhouse gas without anyone’s making any sacrifice’. According to his own calculation, an American’s annual emissions could be offset for a mere \$300/year: ‘Given this cheap price, we can expect most inhabitants of rich countries to prefer to offset most of their emissions, rather than reduce them much.’ (Broome, 2012, p. 90).

To begin with, notice that the rationale is always the same: As long as you earn enough money, you can donate some of it, without having to make any sacrifice, and get off the moral hook. Whatever your intentions are – doing good, improving your public image, relieving your bad conscience – you can still be an effective altruist. It is true that Broome is not explicitly supporting effective altruism but a broader utilitarian approach; it is also true that offsetting can be justified on other grounds than utilitarianism. Still, MacAskill presents this measure as one of the best actions individuals can take to fight against climate change. When he suggests that ‘the easiest and most effective way to cut down your carbon footprint is simply to donate to Cool Earth’ (MacAskill 2015, p. 140), he clearly neglects the intentions that would drive people to do so.

The problem is not with the very idea of offsetting: Many actions involving GHG emissions cannot be avoided or can only be avoided with difficulty; in these cases, offsetting one’s emissions is indeed a good option. The problem is that EA suggests offsetting might be an effective and altruistic substitute for directly reducing one’s individual carbon footprint. Instead of insisting on the complementarity of offsetting and reducing one’s emissions, EA tends to present the first measure as though it was an excuse to avoid implementing the second. Substituting offsetting for direct cuts in individual emissions results in supporting the view that the way we live and consume does not matter as long as we can compensate for acting the way we do. It suggests that there is a morally acceptable way to carry on with our lifestyles and always a way to fix our mistakes without having to question ourselves or the way we relate to the rest of humanity or the rest of the living world. But there is a difference between compensating for something we are doing wrong and trying to stop acting wrongly. It is certainly not enough to give some of our money to top charities if we continue the

same lifestyles that cause climate change. Instead of dealing with the problem at its root, we choose to make a detour and avoid our responsibilities.

According to our Hutchesonian account, a virtuous person would face her responsibilities because it is the way she is: living by doing the right thing and being the kind of person that she wants to be. To deal with climate change, she would rather try to assess first if there is a way to stop directly contributing to harm to other humans and other sentient beings. Offsetting would be, at best, a last resort in cases where we can't avoid emitting significant amounts of GHGs.⁹ So the question she would ask first would be: Can I directly reduce my individual emissions? If the answer is yes, and more often than not it is, then focusing on best intentions would suggest that she tries to mitigate first.

A Hutchesonian account of the ethics of offsetting highlights the shortcomings of offsetting by explaining that a truly virtuous agent would prefer reducing his carbon footprint directly, instead of paying others to do it for him. MacAskill's suggestion should be reversed: Instead of offsetting, whenever possible, we should mitigate our emissions by reducing our intake of meat, the amount we travel, and our use of electricity. It is a question of intention: While an effective altruist, following MacAskill's recommendations, might offset his emissions by paying \$105 per year to get out of the moral woods, an altruistic person would want to face her responsibilities and be consistent. She would rather question her lifestyle and change it in order to reduce her consumption of fossil fuels and of products derived from animal agriculture.

Why is it more virtuous to directly reduce emissions, whenever possible, than to simply offset them? For two main reasons. The first is an integrity-based argument. Having a deep moral commitment to others and the environment implies trying to reduce one's contribution to global poverty and ecological problems as much as

possible. A truly altruistic person relying exclusively on offsetting to protect the climate would violate her moral integrity. She would claim that national and international GHG emissions need to be drastically reduced, but at the same time, she would not be ready to apply the same principle to her own course of action. Benevolent agents should integrate their commitments into a coherent whole. If they believe that GHG emissions should be mitigated on a collective level, that is what they will do on the individual level, not only to be consistent with their values, but also to show to policymakers their determination to support ambitious climate policies. A virtuous person would refuse hypocrisy, rather than essentially sending the message ‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ She would not undermine collective action by thinking she can compensate financially for the wrong she contributes to inflicting. The collective and the individual levels need to be harmonized. Relying only on offsetting on the individual level implies that states can also do this at a collective level and avoid any substantial mitigation measures on their territories. This would lead to the paradoxical situation where all states rely on offsetting, without any place left for actual mitigation.

The second reason is based on the ability of altruistic people to regulate their desires and lifestyles when they contribute to endangering other people. It is an argument based on self-regulation.¹⁰ Hutcheson made a distinction between luxury and temperance. An altruistic person develops her temperance in order to regulate her desires and reconnect them to the state of the world as it stands and what reality is. Luxury is a problem of disproportion or disequilibrium between a desire and an object: Every time we maintain a way of life that contributes to the disruption of the climate system, we live in luxury. Every time we are able to adjust our way of life to respect planetary boundaries, we live in temperance. The altruistic person avoids the disequilibrium between her way of life and the state of the world. In this Hutchesonian

perspective, self-regulation is one major character trait of the altruistic person. Instead of following the urge to satisfy her own self-interest, the altruistic person is able to consider the state of the world and regulate her desires so as to protect others and to live in harmony with her environment. Directly reducing one's carbon footprint is a mark of temperance, whereas paying other people to offset one's emissions is closer to intemperance and luxury. Reduction requires self-regulation and work on oneself; offsetting requires no effort of self-regulation.

Dale Jamieson famously explains that, in the face of global environmental change caused by mass extinction, climate change, and ozone depletion, the best strategy for achieving the best outcomes is to develop and inculcate green virtues. According to him, utilitarians should take virtue seriously: 'the green virtues are those that utilitarians should try to exemplify in themselves and elicit in others, given the reality of global environmental change.' (Jamieson, 2007, p. 181). One virtue he proposes to rehabilitate in our situation of global environmental change is exactly temperance. Temperance is about 'self-restraint and moderation' and leads to 'reducing consumption' (Jamieson, 2007, p. 181), not offsetting the effects of one's consumption. The 'ideal utilitarian moral agent' (Jamieson, 2007, p. 180) should not use the kind of calculation on which offsetting relies; he should focus on non-calculative generators of action, such as temperance, humility, and mindfulness. Jamieson's view on ethics reflects our own: 'the contrast typically drawn between utilitarianism and virtue theory is overdrawn' (Jamieson, 2007, p.182). If effective altruists are serious about fighting global environmental change, then they should be virtue theorists. This implies using offsetting only as a last resort.

3.2. Altruistic Geoengineering?

Just like offsetting, geoengineering is presented by its supporters as a cheap solution to the climate problem that does not require emissions to be reduced or lifestyles to be changed. Geoengineering is an intentional, large-scale intervention in the Earth system designed to counter global warming or offset some of its effects.¹¹ There are two main geoengineering methods: Carbon dioxide removal (CDR) techniques, the purpose of which is to reduce the levels of already emitted carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and solar radiation management (SRM) techniques, which endeavor to reduce the solar radiation received by the Earth. Our main ethical worries about geoengineering techniques apply both to SRM and CDR.

Geoengineering has been gaining increasing political, scientific, and economic momentum for more than a decade, and philosophers have already highlighted many ethical and political problems raised by this measure (Hamilton, 2013; Baatz, 2016; Preston, 2016; Gardiner and Fraginière, 2018). Here, we focus on a philosophical justification of climate engineering, as provided by EA. Neither utilitarianism, nor EA necessarily lead to support for geoengineering: For instance, it is possible to criticize climate engineering technologies on a consequentialist basis (see Baard and Wickman-Svahn, 2016). However, this option is supported by two of the most prominent founders of EA, and it has been embraced enthusiastically by famous individuals within the movement.

According to MacAskill (2015, p. 192), geoengineering ‘could be used as a measure of last resort’ in order to reduce the likelihood of worst-case scenarios. He adds, ‘geoengineering is cheap, enough that in the future, individual countries could unilaterally undertake risky geoengineering projects.’ Singer also contemplates this kind of techno-fix to the climate problem:

Despite the very significant known and unknown risks of geoengineering, there is some plausibility to the idea that we ought to have it in our back pocket as a Plan B in case we fail to reduce greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently to prevent catastrophic climate change. (Singer, 2016b, p. 66).

To make this ‘Plan B’ plausible, ‘we would need to start doing research directed at finding out what might work and how to reduce the risks.’ (Singer, 2016b, p. 66). How to finance this plan B? EA advocates both individual and public financial support of geoengineering research and development.¹² Singer indeed points out that ‘GiveWell has reviewed geoengineering as an opportunity for effective altruism’ (Singer, 2015, p. 199 n13). This is confirmed by the fact that Bill Gates, one of ‘the greatest effective altruists in human history’ (Singer, 2015, p. 50), is now the world’s leading financial supporter of geoengineering research (Hamilton, 2013, p. 44).

MacAskill and Singer may not be truly enthusiastic supporters of geoengineering measures. They both stress that climate engineering technologies are risky and that they only represent a ‘Plan B’ (Singer) or a ‘measure of last resort’ (MacAskill) in case we fail to avoid a catastrophic climate change. That being said, both believe that geoengineering represents a solution to climate change and that individuals should now financially support research into geoengineering projects if they wish to be effective altruists.

One worry is that the ‘Plan B’ and the ‘last resort’ arguments misleadingly and dangerously frame geoengineering as an insurance policy. Just as it is prudent to have an insurance policy, it is prudent, even wise, to pursue geoengineering projects, at least by developing an extensive research program. However, this frame obscures strong ethical concerns, such as the fact that climate engineering would condemn future generations to injecting ever-increasing amounts of sulfate aerosols or using ever-

increasing amounts of negative emissions to counteract the effects of the increase of GHG in the atmosphere. Even if climate engineering could reduce global temperatures, it would still unjustly impose escalating risks on future generations, worsen distributive injustices across generations, and may commit future generations to endless technical management of the climate system (Fragnière and Gardiner, 2016).

Another worry is that a truly altruistic person is very unlikely to financially support geoengineering projects. While this objection could be based on a consequentialist basis, by focusing on the potentially catastrophic side effects of geoengineering technologies on poor people and non-human living beings (Baard and Wickman-Svahn, 2016), we rely here on our Hutchesonian approach and ask rather what our behavior shows about us and the kind of person we want to be.¹³ What kind of people would give financial support to geoengineering research, development, and, eventually, deployment?

Geoengineering relates to the idea that technology could save us from catastrophic climate change by turning the tide and re-establishing more favorable, albeit artificial, conditions for human life on Earth. Once again, we do not have to question our lifestyles or change our behavior. We do not have to reconsider how we relate to other people, other sentient beings, and the rest of nature. We just let technology deal with a problem that we caused in the first place.

Because deploying geoengineering technologies would give so much power to the state(s) or to the person(s) owning them, intentions seem to matter more than ever in this particular case. But the problem is, once again, that the people with the best intentions would probably not be the ones deploying these technologies instead of first reducing their emissions. Furthermore, if the amount of money and effort already being used to support geoengineering were invested in mitigation policies instead, we surely

would have more ethically acceptable options. In other words, if we consider that individual choices can influence public financial support, by showing the government what causes citizens are ready to give money to, then virtuous individuals would show their interest in mitigation measures in preference to any interest in large-scale and potentially catastrophic manipulations of the Earth system.

In our Hutchesonian perspective, some geoengineering projects could be understood as the manifestation of *ignoring our moral sense* and *deceiving our moral sense* (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 188–94). What do we have in mind? In the first case, it means we may disapprove of an action that we perceive as morally wrong, but nevertheless choose to perform it for selfish motives, thus voluntarily ignoring our moral sense. For instance, our moral sense might disapprove of geoengineering because it will likely harm poor people and other sentient beings (see for instance Robock 2008), but we would still choose to support this response to climate change in order to maintain our high-emitting lifestyles.

In the second case, we believe that what has the simple appearance of good is good, when in reality it is wrong. Our moral sense is deceived, because it approves of appearance alone and causes us to judge wrongly. For instance, we are so used to believing in cheap and easy ways to solve our problems that we come to approve of geoengineering, because it appears to be a cost-effective and simple response to climate change and we are convinced that we are in control.

While ignoring our moral sense is motivated primarily by selfishness, deceiving our moral sense can be caused by arrogance. First, selfishness: The decision to engage in geoengineering could be selfish insofar as it would not really be a way to take on the ethical challenges we are facing. On the contrary, it would rather reveal how far we are ready to go to avoid confronting climate change directly, that is, by reducing our own

GHG emissions. While we would claim to act altruistically, we would actually be promoting our own short-term interests.

Hutcheson explained that moral sense could not really be corrupted. But someone could deliberately choose to act because an action was advantageous for him, even while knowing that action was wrong (Hutcheson, 1725, p. 116–17). The strongest motivation for some geoengineers and some of their supporters may not necessarily be combating climate change; they could merely be trying to preserve their comfortable lifestyles at the expense of the wellbeing of others. They might prefer taking the risk of imposing new injustices on distant others, both in space and time, rather than reducing their own emissions. At least, geoengineering reveals the opacity of the intentions that lie behind its deployment: People who would want to preserve their emitting lifestyles would not act otherwise.

Second, arrogance: The very idea of engineering the climate may also rely on the same arrogant attitude that created the climate problem in the first place. Instead of changing the way we relate to nature, we prefer to exploit it as if we were its masters. We see the climate system as needing to be adapted to our fossil-fuel intensive lifestyles. At a time when great advances in Earth system sciences ought to make us humbler, supporters of geoengineering schemes seem to adopt the exact opposite attitude.

Engineering the planet would imply a radical change in our moral responsibilities. Taking responsibility for the ecology of the whole Earth, managing the climate to be both as restorative as possible and as low-risk as possible, while facing considerable scientific uncertainty would represent an unprecedented moral burden. This ‘*total responsibility*’ (Preston, 2012: 198) would be correlated to an ‘existential anxiety’ (Mark, 2009) that few humans ought to, let alone can, assume. In our Hutchesonian

perspective, the virtuous person would not be self-serving and hubristic. She would accept a certain lack of control over the conditions of life and would be aware of the limits of human actions: her moral sense would not be ignored nor deceived. She would observe with scrupulousness, prudence, and ease. Altruistic and humble people would be the most appropriate agents for climate engineering because they are the most likely to have the required courage for living with the total responsibility that comes with geoengineering projects. However, those who display such character traits – altruism, humility, courage – are unlikely to see such projects as appropriate and fitting: People who know their place do not play God (Hartman, 2017).

Effective altruists should not apply simplistic cost-benefit analyses to immensely complex variables in the Earth system, because they should not be so sure that humans are able to calculate everything and always end up with benefits (or, at least, minimal costs) at the end of the day. Their moral sense seems to be deceived by the belief that everything can be controlled. As climate change illustrates, the Earth system can rapidly spin out of control, especially if we cross critical tipping points in the climate system (Steffen et al. 2018). Altering the basic life-support systems for ourselves and other forms of life on Earth even more deeply is probably neither the wisest nor the most altruistic thing to do.

In our understanding, one major reason why some effective altruists support such a morally problematic option is that they do not take into account the intentions that motivate some climate engineers and their supporters to act. If EA asked people who wish to improve the world, or at least to reduce injustices, to be truly altruistic, to act with benevolence, humility, and temperance, it would not advise them to support offsetting and geoengineering. It would rather ask them to lead by example, to directly cut their emissions by reducing their intake of meat, the amount they travel, and their

use of electricity. It would recommend they go into politics, defend their ideals, and change other people's minds, that they become vegetarians, or even better vegans, to reduce their luxury emissions, and that they use renewable energies as much as they can. It would also ask them to become the best persons they can be so they can become truly effective altruists in their daily lives and give their moral sense the place it deserves when it comes to decision-making.

4. Conclusion

By drawing on Hutcheson's moral philosophy, we believe we can better understand some theoretical and practical problems that we think should be brought to the attention of effective altruists. First, doing the most good we can is not always sufficient in terms of living a fully ethical life—we also need to act with the best intentions. One necessary condition for being a moral agent is to act benevolently, but if we only give money to charities and let our moral sense be paralyzed by ignoring or deceiving it, then our lives lack a crucial ethical component. Second, being a good, virtuous person could be the best guarantee of doing the most good we can. Intentions do not only matter intrinsically; they also matter if we wish to achieve the best results. But achieving the best result can never be the sole and only criterion for virtue. Effectiveness cannot be a substitute for altruism, and the pursuit of the best result is not in itself enough to become the best person we can be.

Although they are supported by Singer and MacAskill as the best courses of action, effective altruists could accept that in the fight against climate change, offsetting and support for research into geoengineering appear not to be the most altruistic options. They neither respond to the nature of the climate problem nor help us face the major ethical issues it raises. In our understanding, recommending these courses of

action illustrates precisely the shortcomings resulting from too much focus on effectiveness and not enough on altruism. In doing so, EA tends to restrict altruistic people to a very narrow field of action. It neglects a rich variety of possibilities opened by a broader and more demanding conception of altruism.

As the special IPCC report on global warming of 1.5°C reminds us, rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented transitions in energy, land, urban infrastructure and industrial systems are necessary to limit global warming to 1.5°C with no (or limited) overshoot (IPCC, 2018, p. 17). The two preferred courses of action put forward by EA are not up to the task: Deep transformations in our habits and lifestyles are required, and financially contributing to offsetting and geoengineering projects will not help us get there. We are more in need of becoming truly altruistic people than payments to compensate for our high-emitting lifestyles and false insurance policies. We need to enrich our understanding of altruism so that we are able to change perspectives and become more ambitious when it comes to living a ‘fully ethical life.’

References

- Baard, P. & Wickman-Svahn, P. (2016). Do We Have a Residual Obligation to Engineer the Climate, as a Matter of Justice? In C. J. Preston (Ed.), *Climate Justice and Geoengineering: Ethics and Policy in the Atmospheric Anthropocene* (pp. 49–62). London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Baatz, C. (2014). Climate Change and Individual Duties to Reduce GHG Emissions. *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 17(1), 1–19.
- Baatz, C. (2016). Can We Have It Both Ways? On Potential Trade-Offs Between Mitigation and Solar Radiation Management. *Environmental Values* 25(1), 29–49.
- Berkey, B. (2018). The Institutional Critique of Effective Altruism. *Utilitas* 30(2): 143–171.
- Blomfield, M. (2015). Geoengineering in a Climate of Uncertainty. In J. Moss (Ed.), *Climate Change and Justice* (pp. 39–58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Broome, J. (2012). *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World*. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Broussois, L. (2015) Francis Hutcheson on Luxury and Intemperance: The Mandeville Threat. *History of European Ideas* 41 (8): 1093–1106.
- Fragnière, A. & Gardiner, S. M. (2016). Why Geoengineering is not ‘Plan B’. In C. Preston (Ed.), *Climate Justice and Geoengineering: Ethics and Policy in the Atmospheric Anthropocene* (pp. 15–32). London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Gardiner, S. M. & Fragnière, A. (2018) The Tollgate Principles for the Governance of Geoengineering: Moving Beyond the Oxford Principles to an Ethically More Robust Approach. *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 21(2): 143–174.
- Hamilton, C. (2013). *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Hartman, L. M. (2017). Climate Engineering and the Playing God Critique. *Ethics & International Affairs* 31(3), 313–333.
- Howe, D. W. (1989). Why the Scottish Enlightenment Was Useful to the Framers of the American Constitution. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31(3), 572–87.
- Hutcheson, F. (1725). *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue: In Two Treatises*. London: J. Darby, for W. and J. Smith.
- Hutcheson, F. (1728). *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections: With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*. London, Dublin: J. Darby and T. Browne, for J. Smith and W. Bruce.
- Hutcheson, F. (1755). *A System of Moral Philosophy*. Glasgow, London: R. and A. Foulis (Volume I).
- IPCC (2018). Summary for Policymakers. In V. Masson-Delmotte et al. (Eds), *Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (pp. 1–32). Geneva: WMO.
- Isaacs, T. (2016). The Most Good We Can Do: Comments on Peter Singer’s The Most Good You Can Do. *Journal of Global Ethics* 12(2), 154–160.
- Jamieson, D. (2007) When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists. *Utilitas* 19(2): 160–183.
- Jamieson, D. (2013). Some Whats, Whys and Worries of Geoengineering. *Climatic Change* 121(3): 527–537.
- MacAskill, W. (2014). Replaceability, Career Choice, and Making a Difference. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17(2): 269–283.
- MacAskill, W. (2015). *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism can Help You Make a Difference*. New York: Gotham Book.
- Mark, J. (2009) Hacking the sky. *Earth Island Journal* (Autumn). Retrieved from http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/eij/article/hacking_the_sky
- Pogge, T. (2008). *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (2nd edition). Cambridge: Polity.
- Preston, C. J. (2012). Beyond the End of Nature: SRM and Two Tales of Artificiality for the Anthropocene. *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 15(2): 188–201.
- Preston, C. J. (Ed.). (2016). *Climate Justice and Geoengineering: Ethics and Policy in the Atmospheric Anthropocene*. London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Preston, C. J. (2017). Carbon Emissions, Stratospheric Aerosol Injection, and Unintended Harms. *Ethics & International Affairs* 31(4): 479–493.
- Robock A. (2008). 20 Reasons Why Geoengineering May be a Bad Idea. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 64 (2): 14–18.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1979) [1762]. *Emile or On Education* (A. Bloom, Trans.). New York: Basic Books.
- Rubenstein, J. C. (2016) The Lessons of Effective Altruism. *Ethics & International Affairs* 30(4): 511–526.

- Russell, D. C. (2013). Introduction: Virtue Ethics in Modern Moral Philosophy. In D. C. Russell, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics* (pp. 1–6). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sidgwick, H. (1962) [1907]. *The Methods of Ethics* (7th edition). London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Singer, P. (1972). Famine, Affluence, and Morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1(3): 229–243.
- Singer, P. (2011). *Practical Ethics* (3rd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Singer, P. (2015). *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Singer, P. (2016a) [1972]. *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Singer, P. (2016b). *One World Now: The Ethics of Globalization* (2nd edition). New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Singer, P. (2016c). Precise: *The Most Good You Can Do*. *Journal of Global Ethics* 12(2): 132–136.
- Smith, A. (1759). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Edinburgh: printed for A. Millar, in the Strand; and A. Kincaid and J. Bell.
- Steffen, W. et al. (2018). Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 15(33): 8252–8259.

Notes

¹ We are aware of the difficulty of philosophically defining what an intention is and we understand that such a concept can have different meanings. We use here the concept of intention in a broad sense, which includes not only considerations on the intention as it is ordinarily constructed but also considerations on motivation and attitude. We do so because it seems to us that we need this broad sense of intention to discuss with effective altruists.

² See, for instance, Isaacs, 2016.

³ We refer here especially, but not exclusively, to effective altruists belonging to the category of those who are ‘earning to give’ (MacAskill, 2014; Singer, 2015, pp. 39–54; MacAskill, 2015, pp. 76–78, 147–178).

⁴ Hutcheson is often considered as one of the foremost philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. See for example D. W. Howe, 1989, p. 574: ‘Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) was the acknowledged “Father of the Scottish Enlightenment.” Those who built upon his work included Lord Kames (1695–1782), Thomas Reid (1710–96), Hugh Blair (1718–1800), William Robertson (1721–93), Adam Ferguson 1723–1816), John Millar (1735–1801), and Dugald Stewart (1753–1828). In a class by themselves are the giants of the Scottish Enlightenment: David Hume (1711–76) and Adam Smith (1723–90).’

⁵ As Jennifer Rubenstein (2016, p. 513) stresses, ‘EA can therefore trace its ancestry not only to Singer but also to earlier utilitarian philosophers, such as John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, who argued for bringing about “the greatest amount of good for the greatest number”.’

⁶ Hutcheson distinguishes two types of generic determinations that motivate us to act: self-interest and benevolence. For Hutcheson, benevolence is the heart of moral motivation: it is a virtue with a broad meaning that seems to encompass intention, motivation and attitude. From this point of view, moral intention (the natural tendency to love others and the desire to act accordingly, a type of intentional action) and moral motivation (the intention with which someone acts for the good of others) are taken together. In contrast, moral sense is not directly motivational because approval and a desire for benevolence are not yet sufficient on their own to act morally.

⁷ As virtue ethicists Daniel Russell (2013:2) explains, ‘People who may feel confident in the rightness of their actions can sometimes be brought up short when asked whether they are also being generous, or considerate, or honest. Rightness is about what we’re doing; virtue is also about how we’re living. It resists compartmentalization.’

⁸ In saying this we are diverging slightly from a pure Hutchesonian framework. While Hutcheson would agree that selfish motives are not bad, he would not concede that some of them can be good. Here, we take into account Adam Smith’s critique of Hutcheson’s moral philosophy and we integrate it into our general Hutchesonian account. See Smith, 1759, Part VII, sect. 2, chap. 3.

⁹ For examples where offsetting can represent a good option that is not used as an excuse not to make efforts to reduce one’s individual carbon footprint, see Christian Baatz (2014, p. 10).

¹⁰ We draw here on Broussois, 2015.

¹¹ Megan Blomfield (2015, p. 42) rightly points out that some intentional modifications to the Earth system might be designed for other reasons than addressing the problem of climate change. For example, during the Cold War, geoengineering was conceived by both opposing superpowers as a method of warfare. In this paper, we only address technologies designed to reduce global warming, and we therefore use ‘geoengineering’ and ‘climate engineering’ as synonymous.

¹² Although EA deals primarily with individual actions, both MacAskill and Singer take into account the collective level. While the former speaks of ‘individual countries’ unilaterally undertaking geoengineering projects, the latter explains, more generally, that individual choices of financial support influence public choices of financial support, by showing the government what causes citizens are ready to give money to (Singer, 1972, p. 239). For this reason, it is no surprise that the United States government spends more than \$50 million per year on geoengineering-related research (Jamieson, 2013, p. 536). It complements the private spending of individuals such as Bill Gates.

¹³ This is why we leave aside here debates on the doctrine of double effect. As Christopher Preston (2017, p. 483) sums it up, ‘it is morally worse to bring about a harmful state of affairs as an intended effect of one’s action than it is to bring about the same harmful state of affairs as an unintended side effect of an action.’ This is certainly true, but here the question is not about the distinction between intended effect and unintended side effect; it is a broader questioning of the role that altruism and other virtues play in our lives and how they can help us become better people making better decisions.