

William MacAskill lies and deliberately misrepresents evidence underlying his key arguments in "Doing Good Better"

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Conflicts of interest: in 2018 I unsuccessfully applied for Grants Evaluator position at the Centre for Effective Altruism and for Research Analyst position at Open Philanthropy.

Whenever possible I use Internet Archive to link to sources, dated at MacAskill's citation date of them.

Background

William MacAskill is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Oxford University and a Senior Research Fellow at Global Priorities Institute. He co-founded Giving What We Can, Centre for Effective Altruism, and 80,000 Hours. He is one of the founders of the Effective Altruism movement.

His book, *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make a Difference*, published in 2015, was endorsed by Steven Levitt, Steven Pinker, Peter Singer, Julia Galef, and Tyler Cowen (IA). It appears to be endorsed by the Centre for Effective Altruism (IA).

Summary

In this post, I show that in *Doing Good Better*, William MacAskill knowingly and deliberately misrepresents his sources and uses these misrepresentations to advance the book's key conclusions. The *knowingly and deliberately* part is important, since I argue that MacAskill is not just being careless with facts and interpretations, but that he is acting in bad faith.

I do not dispute the conclusions of the book and I agree with them to a significant extent. However, the way MacAskill arrives to his conclusions is dishonest. Both Centre for Effective Altruism and MacAskill himself have stated that they are against dishonesty and "ends-justify-the-means" reasoning.

The Effective Altruism community and the Centre for Effective Altruism must disassociate themselves from MacAskill, like they dissociated themselves from Intentional Insights [1, 2], if they want to claim to care about truthfulness and honesty.

I claim that:

- MacAskill knowingly and deliberately misrepresents Figure 2 from (Stevenson and Wolfers 2013)** which shows the association between life satisfaction and the natural logarithm of income. MacAskill asserts that this graph shows that "a doubling of income will always increase reported subjective well-being by the same amount." and that "[t]his graph allows us to determine just how much greater a benefit the extreme poor receive from one dollar than you or I do." **This is important, because it crucially supports MacAskill's key claim about the disproportionate impact of focusing philanthropy on the extreme poor.** MacAskill is being dishonest here for three reasons:
 - MacAskill must know about the conflicting literature on the causal relationship between income and life satisfaction, since the paper he cites — *Subjective Well-Being and Income: Is There Any Evidence of Satiation?* — is a direct response to one side of the debate and it introduces the debate (the [Easterlin Paradox](#)) in the very first sentence. Therefore, MacAskill *knowingly* claims the definite causal relationship, while knowing about the uncertainty of this relationship and the existence of conflicting literature, and exemplifies Scott Alexander's [The Man of One Study](#).
 - MacAskill asserts the causal relationship solely based on the association in question. MacAskill does this, despite later in the book writing of another association: "Of course, correlation is not causation. Merely showing that the people's welfare has improved at the same time the West has been offering aid does not prove that aid caused the improvement."
 - Finally, in the book, MacAskill reconstructs only parts of the graph while leaving out the parts that contradict his argument. His argument depends crucially on the relationship between life satisfaction and income being very similar between countries — which it is on the reconstructed graph — but on the original the slopes differ by at least the factor of four.
- MacAskill knowingly and deliberately misrepresents the evidence in favor of deworming.** He cherry-picks the data from the studies that favors his conclusion and simply lies about the results of a long-term follow up study on

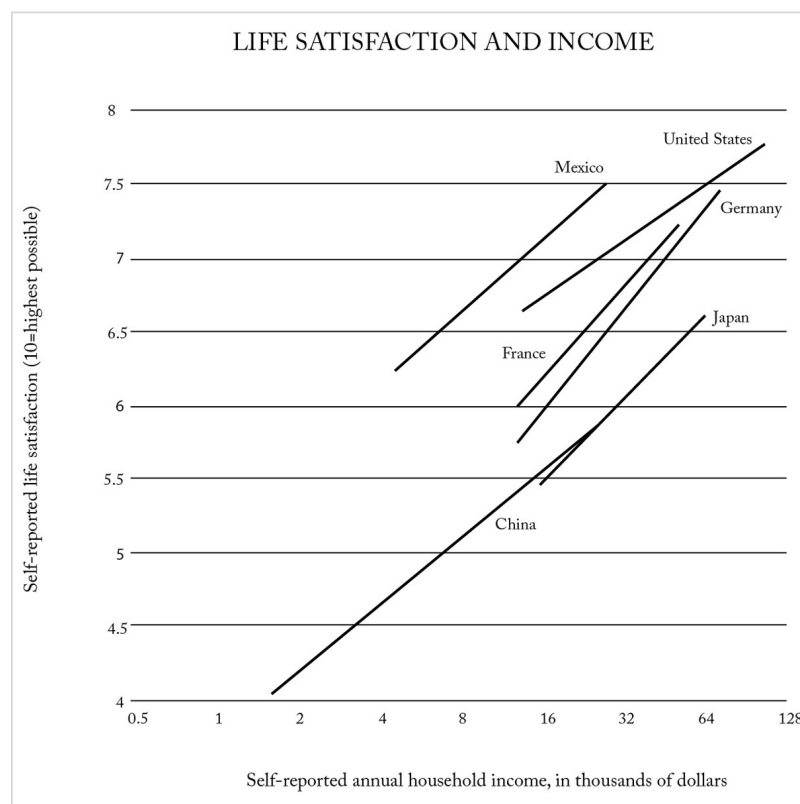
deworming. This is important, because deworming is one of the causes MacAskill recommends the most, and the one that he uses to introduce the effective altruist style of program evaluation.

3. **MacAskill knowingly and deliberately misrepresents GiveWell’s assessments of charities he presents and the strength of evidence of their efficacy.** MacAskill presents GiveWell’s cost-effectiveness estimates with precise figures, for example: “[a]ccording to the most rigorous estimates, the cost to save a life in the developing world is about \$3,400” and concludes that “with a given amount of money, you can benefit people in poor countries five hundred times more than people in rich countries.” (if you think he isn’t being literal — please see [below](#) where I provide context). GiveWell repeatedly stated that such use of their estimates is incorrect; that they’re extremely uncertain about the specific numbers; provide such estimates for comparative purposes; and that one should not interpret them literally. As far as in 2010 GiveWell told MacAskill that he uses cost-effectiveness estimates incorrectly. Despite this, MacAskill continued to misrepresent cost-effectiveness (GiveWell’s and others’) estimates. **This is important, because the literal interpretation of these estimates underlies MacAskill’s key argument about which charities to donate your money to and which career to choose to spend your life on. Furthermore, it shows that MacAskill continues to misrepresent GiveWell even after being caught doing it many years ago.**

1. Life satisfaction and income

MacAskill:

In order to work out the relationship between level of income and level of subjective well-being, economists have conducted large-scale surveys of income levels and the subjective well-being of people in each of them. Their results are given in this graph, which shows the relationship between income and subjective well-being both within a country and across countries.



Source: Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers

The vertical axis of this graph represents self-reported well-being. Those interviewed had to say how satisfied they were with their lives on a scale from 0 to 10. Rating yourself at 10 means you consider yourself maximally happy: you think that, realistically, life couldn’t get any better. Rating yourself at 0 means you consider yourself maximally unhappy: you think that, realistically, life couldn’t get any worse. Most people fall in the middle of this range. The horizontal axis represents annual income.

What’s interesting about this graph is that a doubling of income will always increase reported subjective well-being by the same amount. For someone earning \$1,000 per year, a \$1,000 pay rise generates the same

increase in happiness as a \$2,000 pay rise for someone earning \$2,000 per year, or an \$80,000 pay rise for someone already earning \$80,000 per year. And so on.

This graph allows us to determine just how much greater a benefit the extreme poor receive from one dollar than you or I do. Imagine if your boss called you into her office and told you your salary would double for the next year. You'd be pretty pleased, right? What the conclusions from the economic studies [Note how a single paper morphed into "economic studies" — A.G.] suggest is that the benefit you get from having your salary doubled is the same as the benefit an extremely poor Indian farmer gets from having his salary doubled. If you're on the typical US wage of \$28,000 per year, the benefit you'd get from an additional \$28,000 in income is the same as the benefit a poor Indian farmer would get from an additional \$220.

This gives us a good theoretical reason for thinking that the same amount of money can do one hundred times as much to benefit the very poorest people in the world as it can to benefit typical citizens of the United States. **If you earn as much as the typical American worker, then you are one hundred times as rich as the very poorest people in the world, which means additional income can do a hundred times as much to benefit the extreme poor as it can to benefit you or me.** This isn't to say that income is all that matters to well-being—of course other factors like safety and political freedom are involved. But income certainly plays a critical role in how enjoyable, long, and healthy your life is. Looking at how much we can benefit people via increasing their income gives us a particularly robust way of assessing how much we can benefit others compared to ourselves.

It's not often you have two options, one of which is one hundred times better than the other. Imagine a happy hour where you could either buy yourself a beer for five dollars or buy someone else a beer for five cents. If that were the case, we'd probably be pretty generous—next round's on me! But that's effectively the situation we're in all the time. It's like a 99-percent-off sale, or getting 10,000 percent extra free. It might be the most amazing deal you'll see in your life.

This idea is important enough that I've given it a name. I call it the 100x Multiplier. For those of us living in rich countries, you should expect to be able to do **at least one hundred times** as much to benefit other people as you can to benefit yourself. **[emphasis mine]**

[Here's the paper MacAskill cites.](#)

First, the paper clearly positions itself as a part of the debate while MacAskill leaves the other side out completely, claiming that this single graph allows us to determine the causal relationship between life satisfaction and income. This is dishonest, since it gives the reader the impression of settledness of the conclusions we can draw from it.

Second, consider the following argument¹ :

The sales of ice cream are positively correlated with temperature outside, thus to raise temperature outside we need to increase ice cream sales.

What's the difference between the argument above and the argument below?

The income is positively correlated with happiness, thus to raise happiness we need to increase income.

The difference between the arguments is that the first is obviously false and the second is obviously true. That's the initial impression at least. In reality, the second argument seems right because its conclusion is intuitively right. When we evaluate it, we think "well, obviously income increases happiness!" and we completely forget about the premise and that the structure of the argument is "X is correlated with Y, therefore X causes Y". In fact, later in the book, *MacAskill makes the same exact point*.

Of course, correlation is not causation. Merely showing that the people's welfare has improved at the same time the West has been offering aid does not prove that aid caused the improvement. It could be that aid is entirely incidental, or even harmful, holding back even greater progress that would have happened anyway or otherwise.

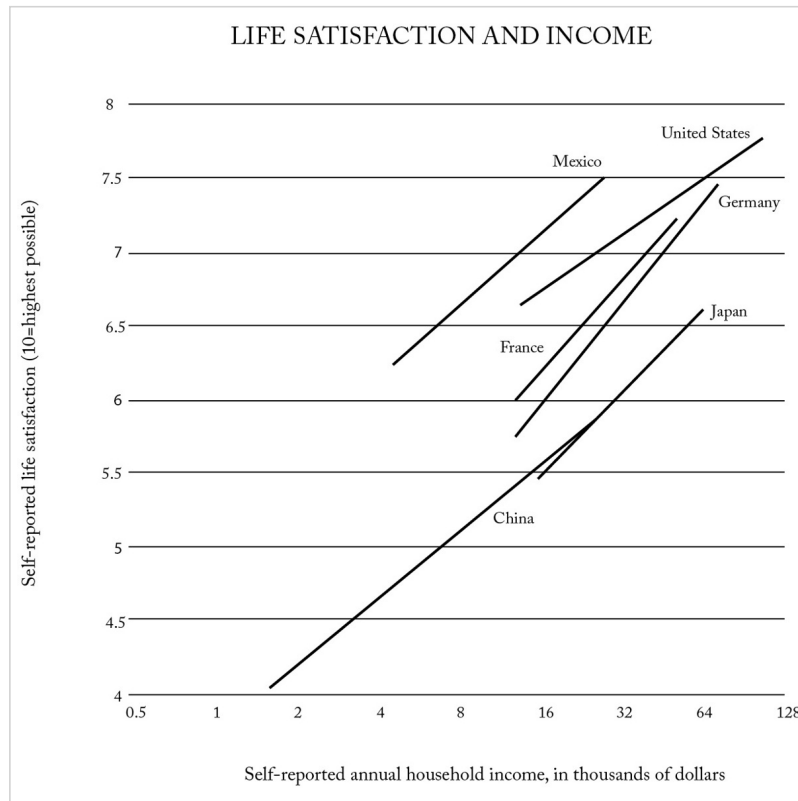
So MacAskill agrees that his argument about the causal relationship between life satisfaction and income is invalid. It seems that Stevenson and Wolfers agree as well, since **they never claimed to demonstrate the causal relationship with this graph alone.**

Therefore, I conclude that MacAskill knew that this argument is a misrepresentation of Stevenson and Wolfers but wrote it anyway.

Third, MacAskill writes:

If you earn as much as the typical American worker, then you are one hundred times as rich as the very poorest people in the world, which means additional income can do a hundred times as much to benefit the extreme poor as it can to benefit you or me.

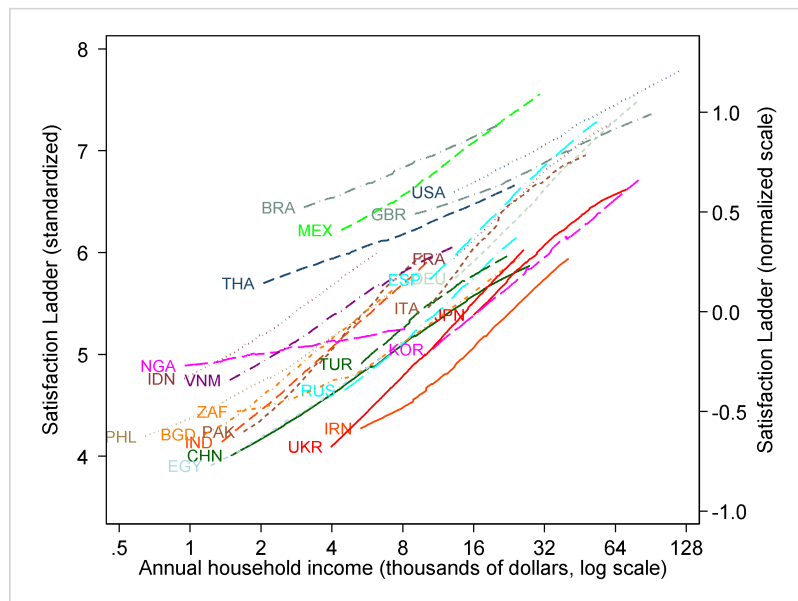
Here MacAskill implies that the correlation between life satisfaction and natural logarithm of income is very similar across America and poor countries. Looking at the graph he provides, this does seem to be the case:



Source: Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers

There's only one problem with the graph: there are no poor countries on it. There are rich United States, France, Germany, and Japan, and middle income Mexico and China. How can we say anything about the extreme poor if the graph doesn't show a single poor country?

Here's the answer: the Stevenson and Wolfers' original graph includes several poor countries — MacAskill just didn't include them. Here's the graph from the paper:



While looking at the graph, it becomes clear why MacAskill didn't reproduce it in full: because it plainly contradicts his argument. I [looked at the slopes carefully](#) and found that five countries have slopes lower than the United States (which

MacAskill uses as an example).

Quantitatively: **doubling the income in the United States is associated with an increase in life satisfaction by 0.37 points. Doubling the income in Nigeria is associated with an increase in life satisfaction by 0.098 points.**

MacAskill simply lied with the graph: he took a graph from the paper, removed everything that didn't fit the argument, and inserted it into the book.

(I will show that MacAskill means “one hundred times as much benefit” literally [below](#))

2. Educational benefits of distributing textbooks and deworming

MacAskill (please see [appendix](#) for full context, in case you're concerned about misrepresentation):

ICS had been trying to improve school attendance and test scores. ...

With the help of collaborators, Kremer tested the different ICS programs one by one. First, he looked at the efficacy of providing schools with additional textbooks. Classrooms would often have only one textbook for a class of thirty, so it seemed obvious that providing more textbooks would help students learn. However, **when Kremer tested this theory by comparing test scores between schools that received books and those that didn't, he found no effect for all but the most high-achieving of students. [emphasis mine]**

Let's pause here for a moment. We see that distributing textbooks (we'll call it *Program A*) is not very useful — it has no impact on learning for most students. But suppose, there is some program B that was also evaluated and for which we have the data about its impact on test scores and its impact on school attendance. If we wanted to compare Program A to Program B, how would we do it?

It seems clear that if we have the data about the impact each program has on test scores, we should compare them, since it's the learning and not just attendance that we care about. Let's return to MacAskill:

Absenteeism is a chronic problem in schools in Kenya, and deworming reduced it by 25 percent. In fact, every child treated spent an extra two weeks in school, and every one hundred dollars spent on the program provided a total of ten years of additional school attendance among all students. Enabling a child to spend an extra day in school therefore cost just five cents. **It wasn't merely that deworming children “worked” at getting children into school. It worked incredibly well.**

What's more, deworming didn't merely have educational benefits. It had health and economic benefits, too. Intestinal worms can cause a variety of maladies, including anemia, intestinal obstruction, and a suppressed immune system that can increase the risk of other diseases like malaria. Deworming decreases all these risks. **[emphasis mine]**

Notice the substitution: when MacAskill wants to show no effect, he uses test scores; when he wants to show effect, he uses school attendance, and “health and economic benefits”. If test scores do matter, it's dishonest to not mention them for deworming; if they don't matter, it's dishonest to use them against distributing textbooks. You could suspect that we simply don't know the impact of deworming on test scores, but this is not the case. The [deworming paper MacAskill cites](#) here *did* evaluate the impact of deworming on test scores — MacAskill just chooses not to tell us about it, selectively picking metrics that support his conclusion (just like he did with income and happiness):

... The **program reduced school absenteeism** in treatment schools by one-quarter, and was far cheaper than alternative ways of boosting school participation. ... Yet **we do not find evidence that deworming improved academic test scores. [emphasis mine]**

MacAskill uses absence of effect on test scores as evidence against distributing textbooks, but does not use absence of effect on test scores as evidence against deworming.

(Later in the book (in chapter three), MacAskill again uses school attendance to show how effective deworming is, while not mentioning the absence of effect on test scores: “deworming schoolchildren does fifteen times better than that [providing free school uniforms], with 139 total years of school per \$1,000”)

MacAskill continues his discussion of deworming with the results from [the long-term follow up study](#):

Moreover, when Kremer’s colleagues followed up with the children ten years later, **those who had been dewormed were working an extra 3.4 hours per week and earning an extra 20 percent of income compared to those who had not been dewormed.** In fact, deworming was such a powerful program that it paid for itself through increased tax revenue. **[emphasis mine]**

Now, you could say that it’s the income that we ultimately care about — and I would agree, to an extent — but then why does MacAskill mention the impact of deworming on school attendance?

Regardless of which is more important, **MacAskill completely misrepresents the findings of this paper**, just like he misrepresented Stevenson and Wolfers and just like he misrepresented the first deworming paper. Here’s what the paper’s abstract says:

Within the subsample working for wages, earnings are 21 to 29% higher for the treatment group.

Here’s the catch: the subsample working for wages is 14-16% out of the total sample. ² **MacAskill lies** that those who had been dewormed were earning an extra 20 percent compared to those who had not been dewormed: **in the entire sample the effect on earnings is not significant.** And while Baird et al don’t write this in the abstract, **they specifically refer to the subsample working for wages**, which in *Doing Good Better* turns into the entire sample. Page 27 of the paper:

there is no effect on mean total labor earnings (setting non-wage earnings to zero for those without a job)

Table 7: Deworming impacts on labor earnings and wages

Dependent variable	Control group variable mean (s.d.)	Coefficient estimate (s.e.) on deworming Treatment indicator	Coefficient estimate (s.e.) on deworming Treatment pupils within 6 km (in ‘000s), demeaned	Obs.
Panel A: Wage earner subsample				
Ln(Total labor earnings, past month)	7.86 (0.88)	0.253*** (0.093)	0.199 (0.168)	710
Ln(Total labor earnings, past month) – top 1% trimmed	7.83 (0.85)	0.269*** (0.092)	0.237 (0.161)	698
Ln(Total labor earnings, past month) – with all gender-age fixed effects	7.86 (0.88)	0.270*** (0.093)	0.197 (0.159)	710
Ln(Wage = Total labor earnings / hours, past month)	2.82 (0.96)	0.165 (0.117)	0.012 (0.160)	625
Indicator for worked for wages (or in-kind) in last month	0.166 (0.372)	-0.015 (0.018)	-0.002 (0.020)	5,081
Panel B: Wage earner since 2007 subsample				
Ln(Total labor earnings, most recent month worked)	7.88 (0.91)	0.211*** (0.072)	0.170 (0.116)	1,175
Indicator for worked for wages (or in-kind) since 2007	0.244 (0.430)	0.000 (0.021)	0.040 (0.024)	5,081
Panel C: Full sample				
Ln(Total labor earnings, past month) – Heckman selection correction	7.86 (0.88)	0.285*** (0.108)	0.148 (0.170)	5,082
Total labor earnings, past month, earnings=0 for non-earners	619 (2,060)	27 (81)	-17 (97)	5,084
Total labor earnings, past month – 95 th percentile (quantile regression), earnings=0 for non-earners	619 (2,060)	290** (117)	123 (140)	5,084

Notes: Each row is from a separate OLS regression analogous to equation 4, except the quantile regression in Panel C. Ln(Wage) adjusts for the different reporting periods for earnings (month) and hours (week), and is missing for those with zero earnings. All observations are weighted to maintain initial population proportions. Standard errors are clustered by school. Significant at 90% (*), 95% (**), 99% (***) confidence. All regressions include controls for baseline 1998 primary school population, geographic zone of the school, survey wave and month of interview, a female indicator variable, baseline 1998 school grade fixed effects, the average school test score on the 1996 Busia District mock exams, total primary school pupils within 6 km, and the cost-sharing school indicator.

At this point you might also start wondering: surely, the paper didn’t just examine the earnings and hours work (the only indicators MacAskill reports)? What about health? What about educational attainment (increased school attendance from the first paper should have had some consequences, after all)? What MacAskill fails to report here?

Here are all the variables from Table 3 and the effect of deworming on them Baird et al report:

- Moderate-heavy worm infection (1999, 2001 parasitological surveys): **negative effect**
- Hemoglobin (Hb) level (1999, 2001 parasitological survey samples): **no effect**
- Falls sick often (self-reported), 1999: **negative effect**
- Malaria in the last week (self-reported), 1999: **no effect**
- Self-reported health “very good”: **positive effect**
- Self-reported currently “very happy”: **no effect**
- Index of wellbeing (0 to 1): **no effect** (recall our discussion of happiness — if we found a negative association between amount of worms and happiness and well-being, we would conclude that removal of worms would increase people’s happiness and well-being, right?)
- Body mass index (BMI = Weight in kg / (height in m)²): **no effect**

- Height (cm): **no effect**
- Respondent health expenditures (medicine, in/out-patient) in past month (KSh): **positive effect** (i.e. dewormed sample both had better health and higher health expenditures)

You can check the rest of the results yourself (Tables 4-9), but the most curious ones are the following (Table 4):

- Total primary school participation, 1998-2001: **positive effect**
- Grades of schooling attained: **no effect**
- Indicator for repetition of at least one grade (1998-2007): **positive effect**

That is, **dewormed children spent more time in school, but this only resulted in more children repeating the grades, and had no effect on the number of grades finished.**

To conclude, **MacAskill dishonestly contrasted the effects of deworming to other programs and then proceeded to cherry-pick the most favorable results while directly lying about their magnitude.**

3. Cost-effectiveness estimates

MacAskill:

What we've seen is that thinking carefully about how you can do the most to benefit others doesn't just allow you to do a bit more good—it enables you to do vastly more than you might have done otherwise.

Imagine saving a single person's life: you pass a burning building, kick the door down, rush through the smoke and flames, and drag a young child to safety. If you did that, it would stay with you for the rest of your life. If you saved several people's lives—running into a burning building one week, rescuing someone from drowning the next week, and diving in front of a bullet the week after—you'd think your life was really special. You'd be in the news. You'd be a hero.

But we can do far more than that.

According to the most rigorous estimates, the cost to save a life in the developing world is about \$3,400 (or \$100 for one QALY). This is a small enough amount that most of us in affluent countries could donate that amount every year while maintaining about the same quality of life. Rather than just saving one life, we could save a life every working year of our lives. Donating to charity is not nearly as glamorous as kicking down the door of a burning building, but the benefits are just as great. Through the simple act of donating to the most effective charities, we have the power to save dozens of lives. That's pretty amazing. **[emphasis mine]**

The [GiveWell page](#) MacAskill cites says:

Using \$5.30 as the total cost per net in Malawi and \$7.50 for DRC, we estimate the cost per child life saved through an AMF-funded LLIN distribution at about \$3,340 [81]

This does not include other potential benefits of LLINs (non-fatal cases of malaria prevented, prevention of deaths in age groups other than under-5 year olds, prevention of other mosquito-borne diseases, etc.). Full details at our [report on mass distribution of LLINs](#).

As a general note on the limitations to this kind of cost-effectiveness analysis, we believe that cost-effectiveness estimates such as these should not be taken literally, due to the significant uncertainty around them. We provide these estimates (a) for comparative purposes and (b) because working on them helps us ensure that we are thinking through as many of the relevant issues as possible. **[emphasis mine]**

It's clear that MacAskill misquotes GiveWell; and while he wasn't technically lying — GiveWell did indeed try to produce the most rigorous estimate — he used this estimate in precisely the way GiveWell warned against.

Moreover, MacAskill knew exactly what GiveWell thinks of their cost-effectiveness estimates: In 2010, Holden Karnofsky (a co-founder of GiveWell and the Executive Director of Open Philanthropy) wrote a post [Cost-effectiveness estimates: inside the sausage factory](#). Here's some quotes from the "Bottom line" of the post:

There is a lot of uncertainty in this [deworming] estimate, and this uncertainty isn't necessarily "symmetrical." Estimates of different programs' cost-effectiveness, in fact, could be colored by very different degrees of optimistic assumptions. ...

I think it is appropriate to say that available evidence suggests that deworming can be as cost-effective as any other health intervention. ...

I do not think it is appropriate to conclude that deworming is more cost-effective than vaccinations, tuberculosis treatment, etc. **I think it is especially inappropriate to conclude that deworming is several times more cost-effective than vaccinations, tuberculosis treatment, etc. ...**

In my view, the greatest factor behind the realized cost-effectiveness of a program is the specifics of who carries it out and how. **[emphasis mine]**

(Here's MacAskill in 2015: "deworming schoolchildren does fifteen times better than that [providing free school uniforms], with 139 total years of school per \$1,000")

In the comments section of the post MacAskill (Crouch, at the time) has an argument with Karnofsky and in one of the comments he writes:

Points where we [MacAskill and Karnofsky] agree:

1) Cost-effectiveness point estimates embody a lot of uncertainty **(we both know and take seriously the DCP2 comment that the point estimates are orders of magnitude estimates).** **[emphasis mine]**

In the book, MacAskill never mentions that cost-effectiveness estimates are orders of magnitude estimates, and the wording he uses and the conclusions he draws imply that the \$3,400 estimate is precise:

According to the most rigorous estimates, the cost to save a life in the developing world is about \$3,400 (or \$100 for one QALY).

Earlier in the book, while discussing life satisfaction and income, MacAskill introduced the "100x Multiplier":

This idea is important enough that I've given it a name. I call it the 100x Multiplier. **For those of us living in rich countries, you should expect to be able to do at least one hundred times as much to benefit other people as you can to benefit yourself.** **[emphasis mine]**

And lest you think that he is being metaphorical, he clarified what he thinks about the Multiplier in Notes:

Note that the figure of one hundred is a baseline. I believe that if we try hard, we should be able to do even more good for even less personal cost. This is for two reasons. First, we've only looked at one problem: global poverty. As discussed in chapter ten, there may be even better opportunities for helping others, in which case the 100x Multiplier is an underestimate. **[emphasis mine]**

Later, MacAskill combines his literal interpretation of GiveWell's \$3,400 estimate with earning-to-give:

Earlier I said that one of the most cost-effective ways to save lives is by distributing antimalarial bed nets: \$3,400 pays for 560 nets, which on average will prevent one death due to malaria. By pursuing medical oncology, Greg could therefore donate 50 percent of his \$200,000 per year earnings while still having a very comfortable \$100,000 per year pretax salary (donations are tax-deductible). His donations would save dozens of lives a year, considerably more than he could have done if he'd worked directly in a poor country. ...

In 2014, Greg donated £20,000, enough to save ten lives. **[emphasis mine]**

Oh, wait. It seems that I was wrong after all. MacAskill does realize that these estimates are not precise and they are just estimates:

Importantly, the cost-effectiveness estimates given are just that: estimates. The figures for Kaposi's sarcoma, condom distribution, and antiretroviral therapy are individual estimates based on specific contexts and may therefore be optimistic. The figure for bed-net distribution is more robust—the calculation behind it tries to correct for biases in favor of optimism, and takes into account the specific context in which the charities work—but even this estimate should not be taken as gospel. However, in the context of fat-tailed distributions, even rough estimates are vitally important for decision making. **In the health-care graph, the best program is estimated to be five hundred times more effective than the worst program (which, remember, is still a good program).**

Even if the highest estimates were too optimistic by a factor of fifty, it would still be vitally important to focus on the best programs rather than merely good ones. [emphasis mine]

He doesn't: he mouths the words but he doesn't believe what he writes. He says that even if the highest estimates are optimistic by a factor of fifty — that's ok, because the best program is five hundred times more effective. Except that in 2011, GiveWell discovered that the cost-effectiveness estimate for deworming³ that GiveWell and Giving What We Can (where MacAskill is a co-founder) relied on was off **by a factor of about 100**. And in 2014, GiveWell's optimistic estimate for Deworm the World Initiative's cost per equivalent life saved differed from pessimistic **by a factor of 2118** (GiveWell's spreadsheet).

MacAskill references the GiveWell page that links to this spreadsheet when discussing deworming in the book's introduction.

Here, you could argue, "of course MacAskill won't specify all the details about cost-effectiveness estimates in the book. It's a popular book that serves as an introduction to the concepts of Effective Altruism and it's not fair to expect it to read like academic literature."

This argument enticing, but it ignores my key claim: **MacAskill doesn't just "simplify". He cites GiveWell and uses their estimates in precisely the fashion GiveWell wrote not to use them.**

Karnofsky expressed precisely the same concern, although wording it very carefully, about MacAskill's (and GWWC's) use of GiveWell's estimates in 2011. In the comments section of his *Why We Can't Take Expected Value Estimates Literally (Even When They're Unbiased)* post, Karnofsky has a lengthy exchange with Toby Ord (a co-founder of the Effective Altruism movement and the founder of Giving What We Can) in which he writes:

There are several cases in which Giving What We Can appears to take cost-effectiveness estimates literally even though they do not include adjustments of the sort described here. The quote from Will in the above post is one example; another is the statement that "Charities which focus on STH, schistosomiasis, and LF are at the very top end of cost-effectiveness — **about 100 times more effective** than typical developing-world health interventions." [emphasis mine]

And:

I think it is worth noting that **Will's 2010 comments appear inconsistent with the reasoning of this post (not just neglecting to mention it)**. He argues that even a deworming charity known to be wasting 26% of its money "still would do very well (taking DCP2: $\$3.4/\text{DALY} * (1/0.74) = \$4.6/\text{DALY}$ – slightly better than their most optimistic estimate for DOTS [$\$5/\text{DALY}$]" and concludes that "the advocacy questions [relevant to whether this 26% is spent effectively] don't need to be answered in order to make a recommendation." **This is a much stronger statement than the one you attribute to him and seems to require taking the estimates literally.** {emphasis mine}

And here's MacAskill in *Doing Good Better*, published in 2015:

In the United States, public health experts regard any program that provides one QALY for less than \$50,000 as a good value, and health programs will often be funded even if the cost per QALY is much higher than \$50,000. In contrast, **providing the same benefit in poor countries (such as by distributing insecticide-treated bed nets to prevent the spread of malaria) can cost as little as one hundred dollars. That means that, with a given amount of money, you can benefit people in poor countries five hundred times more than people in rich countries.**

Again, we see the 100x Multiplier at work. We're about one hundred times richer than the poorest billion people in the world, and we can do several hundred times more to help them than we can to help others in the rich countries we live in. [emphasis mine]

4. William MacAskill on honesty

On 12 January 2017, William MacAskill wrote in a comment to *EA Has A Lying Problem* post by Sarah Constantin:

I think that the issue of honesty for people who are consequentialist-sympathetic is very important. Insofar as pure consequentialists don't place any intrinsic disvalue on promise-keeping or honesty, they are likely to be trusted less as a result – which is a very bad thing if you want to do good in the world! **This makes it *extra* important**

for consequentialist-sympathetic groups to place great emphasis on honesty and promise-keeping, and try to cultivate personalities where not being honest is very difficult psychologically for them. [emphasis mine]

5. Centre for Effective Altruism on honesty

The [page devoted to Centre for Effective Altruism's guiding principles](#) says:

Because we believe that trust, cooperation, and accurate information are essential to doing good, we strive to be honest and trustworthy. More broadly, we strive to follow those rules of good conduct that allow communities (and the people within them) to thrive. We also value the reputation of effective altruism, and recognize that our actions reflect on it. [emphasis mine]

effectivealtruism.org (run by Centre for Effective Altruism) lists *Doing Good Better* on their [Resources](#) page and has a [page](#) devoted to the book.

6. Conclusion

One thing I'm particularly stupefied about is the wide praise for the book. It came out in 2015. It was endorsed by a range of people I deeply respect. It was positively reviewed by [Marginal Revolution](#), [The Guardian](#), and [Quillette](#).

80,000 Hours, which MacAskill cofounded, was [funded by Y Combinator](#) and received \$1,635,000 over 2017 and 2018 from Open Philanthropy.⁴

As I mentioned in the beginning of the post, William MacAskill is [the President of the Centre for Effective Altruism](#) and [the President of 80,000 Hours](#).

I will reiterate that, **if the Effective Altruism community believes that truthfulness and honesty are important, it must dissociate itself from William MacAskill, who's modus operandi is deception and seriously ponder how he was able to be one of the movement's leaders for more than five years.**

I will conclude this post by quoting MacAskill's [Setting Community Norms and Values: A response to the InIn Open Letter](#), published on the Effective Altruism Forum in 2016:

As documented in the Open Letter, Intentional Insights have been systematically misleading in their public communications on many occasions, have astroturfed, and have engaged in morally dubious hiring practices. But what's been most remarkable about this affair is how little Gleb has been willing to change his actions in light of this documentation. If I had been in his position, I'd have radically revised my activities, or quit my position long ago. Making mistakes is something we all do. But ploughing ahead with your plans despite extensive, deep and well-substantiated criticism of them by many thoughtful members of the EA community — who are telling you not just that your plans are misguided but that they are actively harmful — is not ok. It's the opposite of what effective altruism stands for.

7. Addendum: MacAskill's Errata page

Here's MacAskill's [Errata](#) page for the book. I encourage you to check it out for yourself, especially the comments on Deworming (contrast his deworming cost thought experiment with [Karnofsky's 2010 blog post](#)) and PlayPump (contrast his comment with [Colin Morris' response letter](#) at the end of the page).

Note that that page doesn't address any of my concerns with the book.

8. Addendum: GiveDirectly

8.1. GiveDirectly's "independent evaluation"

MacAskill quotes GiveDirectly as saying ([source of the quote](#)):

An independent evaluation of our work in Kenya by Innovations for Poverty Action found that recipients use transfers for a wide variety of purposes that on average generate large income gains. Common uses range from buying food to investing in tangible assets such as housing and livestock to investing in children's education.

Note that in the book MacAskill links to a 2013 draft of the GiveDirectly's RCT paper (the same one GiveDirectly links in the quote above), which mentions Shapiro's previous affiliation with GiveDirectly on the very first page. Thus, he either (1)

didn't ever open that paper or (2) knew that the evaluation was not done by the "independent development think tank Innovations for Poverty Action" as GiveDirectly page stated.

Looking at the development of that 2013 draft we see:

A 2013 [draft](#) of the paper evaluating GiveDirectly's RCT mentions that Jeremy Shapiro (one of its authors) was the Director of GiveDirectly twice: on pages 1 and 7.

A 2016 [draft](#) of the paper mentions that Shapiro was the Director of GiveDirectly once: on page 37.

The 2016 [paper](#) that was published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* never mentions that Shapiro was the Director of GiveDirectly and doesn't report any conflicts of interest.

8.2. GiveDirectly's dishonest reporting of the results

[GiveDirectly](#) (none of the archiving sites save the page correctly for some reason):

These conversations have demonstrated that we did a bad job in our initial note in describing the data and the range of interpretations one might take from them, including more negative interpretations. We take responsibility for that. The post was criticized for lacking "nuance and detail," and we agree with that assessment.

The post they were responding to:

"So, what's the problem," you might ask. "You told us all of this in short form in your last post. Why run through it in more detail?" Well, I, along with others, did get some push back on my interpretation that the nine-month impacts are no longer there. In particular, **GiveDirectly got in touch to inform me that I had missed their blog post on HS (18), published on February 14, 2018**. This is true: I had missed it and immediately updated my post to set the record straight. Then, **I read their post. I could barely believe what I was reading**. I am pasting a paragraph from it here, but the whole post is short: please read it in its entirety, so you don't have to take my word.

...

Contrast this with the abstract of HS (18) above. **Note, in particular, the lack of detail or nuance in the blog post. Whereas the HS (18) abstract mentions every time which estimate refers to what type of comparison, the above paragraph only gives us great news: all effects are sustained; new positive effects appeared; some effects are even larger now! Sigh... [emphasis mine]**

9. Addendum: Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE)

MacAskill:

According to Animal Charity Evaluators (a research charity I helped to set up), by donating to charities like Mercy For Animals or the Humane League, which distribute leaflets on vegetarianism, it costs about one hundred dollars to convince one person to stop eating meat for one year.

ACE is a profoundly dishonest organization. See: [The Actual Number is Almost Surely Higher](#) ([Internet Archive](#)).

Also see [Concerns with ACE research](#). Although, note that despite listing concerns, this article is very sympathetic to ACE, which results in rather amusing results. For example, *The Actual Number is Almost Surely Higher* says:

The research conducted by these organizations [ACE and The Humane League] is not merely unreliable, but systematically deceptive.

While *Concerns with ACE research* says:

ACE's research has been criticised in the past, most notably in a December 2016 blogpost by Harrison Nathan. ACE's research has improved since then with some of the most serious problems being resolved.

With research being systematically deceptive, apparently, simply being one of the problems.

10. Addendum: more misquotes and misrepresentations from *Doing Good Better*

These were either too difficult to explain in the main body or incidental and do not appear to be advancing the book's key claims. They're still important, since they show the MacAskill's preferred reasoning style.

10.1. Jobs that make a difference

MacAskill:

Indeed, medicine is the banner career for people who want to make a difference. Every year, about twenty thousand people in the United States and eight thousand people in the United Kingdom go to medical school, and the number is growing year after year. **Even for those for whom medicine isn't a good fit, the desire to pursue a career that makes a difference is widespread. According to one study, 70 percent of young people regard ethical considerations as "crucial" in their choice of employer.** Enterprises like Teach for America have grown dramatically, explicitly targeting students who care more about making a difference than about making a high salary. Organizations like Net Impact, Idealist, and ethicalcareers.org all offer advice on choosing a vocation that does good. Even Oprah Winfrey, on her website, provides examples of "jobs that make a difference."

So, MacAskill uses the 70% number as evidence of people desiring to pursue a career that makes a difference. Now, look at [the source article](#):

Over 70% of students said that a company's ethical track record is a crucial factor when choosing their employer.

It has nothing to do with "making a difference". MacAskill just took the number out of context and misinterpreted it.

10.2. Benefits from medicine in the US

MacAskill:

Greg found work by an epidemiologist named John Bunker, who estimated that the total benefits from medicine in the United States is about 7 QALYs per person

MacAskill cites "[The Role of Medical Care in Contributing to Health Improvements within Societies](#)," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 30, no. 6 (December 2001), 1,260-3.. The paper contains no such estimate.

10.3. PlayPumps

MacAskill:

One reporter estimated that, in order to provide a typical village's water needs, the merry-go-round would have to spin for twenty-seven hours per day.

[The article that MacAskill cites](#):

In various press releases, interviews and on its website the charity has repeatedly referred to its ambition to build 4,000 Playpumps by 2010 to bring the "benefit of clean drinking water to up to 10 million people". The concept is simple: a merry-go-round is connected to a bore-hole. As children play, the spinning motion pumps underground water into a raised tank.

However, the Sphere Project states that the recommended minimum daily water requirement is 15 litres per person which – based on the pump's capabilities – would require children to be "playing" non-stop for 27 hours in every day to meet the 10 million figure. Under more reasonable assumptions, a Playpump could theoretically provide the bare minimum water requirements for about 200 people a day based on two hours' constant "play" every day – considerably less than its claimed potential.

Note, that article doesn't ever mention a "typical village's water needs". 27 hours figure only illustrates that the forecast of the PlayPumps nonprofit to bring clean water to 10 million people via building 4 thousand PlayPumps is unrealistic.

10.4. Charity Navigator's views on overhead

MacAskill:

One popular way of evaluating a charity is to look at financial information regarding how the charity spends its money. How much does the charity spend on administration? How much is its CEO paid? What percentage of donations are put directly to the charity's main programs? This is the approach that Charity Navigator, the oldest

and most popular charity evaluator, has taken for the last fifteen years. **According to Charity Navigator, “Savvy donors know that the financial health of a charity is a strong indicator of the charity’s programmatic performance. They know that in most cause areas, the most efficient charities spend 75 percent or more of their budget on their programs and services and less than 25 percent on fund-raising and administrative fees.”**

Using these metrics, let’s see how the three charities compare.

Books For Africa’s **overhead costs are a tiny 0.8 percent of their total expenditure (which was \$24 million in 2013), and their CEO is paid \$116,204, which is only 0.47 percent of that total expenditure. For these reasons, and for their general financial transparency, Charity Navigator has given BFA its highest four-star rating for seven years running. ...**

You certainly wouldn’t think about how much Apple and Microsoft each spend on administration, and you wouldn’t think about how much their respective CEOs are paid. Why would you? As a consumer you only care about the product you get with the money you spend; details about the financials of the companies who make the products are almost always irrelevant. **If Apple spent a lot of money to attract a more talented management team, you might even consider that a good sign that their products were the best on the market!**

If we don’t care about financial information when we buy products for ourselves, why should we care about financial information when we buy products for other people? Take a silly example: imagine I set up a charity that distributes doughnuts to hungry police officers and I am so enthusiastic about the mission that I manage to spend only 0.1 percent of the charity’s money on overhead, with the rest spent on doughnuts and distribution. **Suppose, moreover, that I, as the CEO of this charity, don’t take a salary at all. Would I really have created an amazing charity? [emphasis mine]**

Here’s the full quote from the [Charity Navigator’s page](#) MacAskill cites:

Savvy donors know that the financial health of a charity is a strong indicator of the charity’s programmatic performance. They know that in most cause areas, the most efficient charities spend 75% or more of their budget on their programs and services and less than 25% on fundraising and administrative fees. **However, they also understand that mid-to-large sized charities do require a strong infrastructure therefore a claim of zero fundraising and/or administrative fees is unlikely at best. They understand that a charity’s ability to sustain its programs over time is just as important as its short-term day-to-day spending practices. Therefore, savvy donors also seek out charities that are able to grow their revenue at least at the rate of inflation, that continue to invest in their programs and that have some money saved for a rainy day.** All of this analysis is provided on Charity Navigator’s website for free, but when considering groups not found here, savvy donors ask the charity for copies of its three most recent Forms 990. Not only can the donor examine the charity’s finances, but the charity’s willingness to send the documents is a good way to assess its commitment to transparency. ...

Sophisticated donors realize that charities need to pay their top leaders a competitive salary in order to attract and retain the kind of talent needed to run a multi-million dollar organization and produce results. But they also don’t just take the CEO’s compensation at face value; they benchmark it against similar-sized organizations engaged in similar work and located in the same region of the country. To help you make your own decision, Charity Navigator’s analysis reveals that the average CEO’s compensation of the charities we evaluate is almost \$150,000. In general, salaries tend to be higher in the northeast and at arts and education charities. **Sophisticated donors also put the CEO’s salary into context by examining the overall performance of the organization. They know it is better to contribute to a charity with a well-paid CEO that is meeting its goals than to support a charity with an underpaid CEO that fails to deliver on its promises. ...**

Although it takes some effort on their part to assess a charity’s programmatic impact, donors who are committed to advancing real change believe that it is worth their time. Before they make a contribution, they talk with the charity to learn about its accomplishments, goals and challenges. These donors are prepared to walk away from any charity that is unable or unwilling to participate in this type of conversation. **[emphasis mine]**

MacAskill took the quote out of context and completely misrepresented it to make it look as if overhead was the only thing that matters to Charity Navigator.

10.5. Steve Jobs’ interest in electronics

MacAskill writes:

The evidence therefore suggests that following your passion is a poor way to determine whether a given career path will make you happy. Rather, passion grows out of work that has the right features. This was even true of Steve Jobs. **When he was young, he was passionate about Zen Buddhism. He traveled in India, took plenty of LSD, shaved his head, wore robes, and seriously considered moving to Japan to become a monk. He first got into electronics only reluctantly, as a way to earn cash on the side,** helping his tech-savvy friend Steve Wozniak handle business deals while also spending time at the All-One Farm. **[emphasis mine]**

For words *He traveled in India* MacAskill references Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 39–50. These pages mention Jobs' travel (and other things), but never mention how he helped Steve Wozniak with business deals. They do however reference Jobs' previous interest in technology and electronics, directly contradicting MacAskill.

Page 43:

In February 1974, after eighteen months of hanging around Reed, Jobs decided to move back to his parents' home in Los Altos and look for a job. It was not a difficult search. At peak times during the 1970s, the classified section of the San Jose Mercury carried up to sixty pages of technology help-wanted ads. One of those caught Jobs's eye. "Have fun, make money," it said. That day Jobs walked into the lobby of the video game manufacturer Atari and told the personnel director, who was startled by his unkempt hair and attire, that he wouldn't leave until they gave him a job. ...

Jobs thus became one of the first fifty employees at Atari, working as a technician for \$5 an hour. "In retrospect, it was weird to hire a dropout from Reed," Alcorn recalled. "But I saw something in him. **He was very intelligent, enthusiastic, excited about tech.**" **[emphasis mine]**

In February 1974, Jobs became a technician at Atari. This was two months before his India trip. No mention of Wozniak.

Page 48:

[After Jobs' return from India] They [Jobs' parents] took him back home, where he continued trying to find himself. It was a pursuit with many paths toward enlightenment. **In the mornings and evenings he would meditate and study Zen, and in between he would drop in to audit physics or engineering courses at Stanford.** **[emphasis mine]**

This is late 1974. Jobs is auditing classes in physics and engineering at Stanford. No mention of Wozniak. It's more than 6 months until Wozniak's Apple I idea.

So, Steve Jobs was in fact interested in technology and electronics himself, *as the very pages that MacAskill cites show*.

Objection: Here, you could argue that it was just carelessness and it's wrong for me to call it a deliberate misrepresentation. MacAskill probably needed a reference to back up what he already had in the draft, so he (or his research assistant) just found a biography of Jobs and this is how Isaacson's book became referenced in *Doing Good Better*.

This interpretation is indefensible. First of all, it's not just the book that is referenced, but the specific pages. Furthermore, these pages (39-50) do not span a single complete chapter. Page 39 is closer to the end of the second chapter (The Dropout) while page 50 is in the middle of the third chapter (Atari and India), so the interpretation that MacAskill (or his research assistant) just found a chapter on India and LSD doesn't work either. **Somebody did look at the book, decided to reference these specific pages, and ignored the contradictions.**

Here are some more quotes from the two chapters I mentioned above:

Page 37:

And even though he [Jobs] barely indulged it at Reed, **there was still an undercurrent of electronic geekiness in his soul** that would someday combine surprisingly well with the rest of the mix. **[emphasis mine]**

Page 55:

Bushnell agreed. "There is something indefinable in an entrepreneur, and I saw that in Steve," he said. **"He was interested not just in engineering, but also the business aspects.** I taught him that if you act like you can do

something, then it will work. I told him, ‘Pretend to be completely in control and people will assume that you are.’”
[emphasis mine]

Notice how close pages 37 and 55 are to referenced 39-50 and that they directly contradict MacAskill.

In addition to all of that, if we try to look at the rest of the book, we will find even more evidence that Jobs was interested in electronics for a very long time and didn’t just want to make money off it. Few more examples:

Page 8:

“The first computer terminal I ever saw was when my dad brought me to the Ames Center,” he said. “I fell totally in love with it.”

Page 10:

Like most kids, he became infused with the passions of the grown ups around him. “Most of the dads in the neighborhood did really neat stuff, like photovoltaics and batteries and radar,” Jobs recalled. “I grew up in awe of that stuff and asking people about it.”

Page 16:

He had few friends his own age, but he got to know some seniors who were immersed in the counterculture of the late 1960s. It was a time when the geek and hippie worlds were beginning to show some overlap. “My friends were the really smart kids,” he said. “**I was interested in math and science and electronics.** They were too, and also into LSD and the whole counterculture trip.” [emphasis mine]

Page 25:

When it was finished, Fernandez told Wozniak there was someone at Homestead High he should meet. “His name is Steve. He likes to do pranks like you do, and he’s also into building electronics like you are.” It may have been the most significant meeting in a Silicon Valley garage since Hewlett went into Packard’s thirty-two years earlier. “Steve and I just sat on the sidewalk in front of Bill’s house for the longest time, just sharing stories—mostly about pranks we’d pulled, and also what kind of electronic designs we’d done,” Wozniak recalled. “We had so much in common. Typically, it was really hard for me to explain to people what kind of design stuff I worked on, but Steve got it right away. And I liked him. He was kind of skinny and wiry and full of energy.” Jobs was also impressed. “Woz was the first person I’d met who knew more electronics than I did,” he once said, stretching his own expertise. “I liked him right away. I was a little more mature than my years, and he was a little less mature than his, so it evened out. Woz was very bright, but emotionally he was my age.”

10.6. Open borders and the need to test social programs

MacAskill in Chapter 5:

The example of Scared Straight shows the importance of ensuring, wherever possible, that large-scale social programs undergo rigorous testing through controlled trials before they are put into practice. If an amateur chemist created a pill he claimed would reduce crime, we would never administer it to thousands of children without rigorous testing because it would be dangerous, not to mention illegal, to do so. Yet new social programs like Scared Straight can be rolled out without any good evidence behind them. **Without rigorous testing, we can’t know if a social program is making things better, making things worse, or achieving nothing at all.** Of course, sometimes programs are too small in scale for testing to be a good use of money, and sometimes rigorous trials are impossible. **But our default attitude should be that, if a social program is going to be rolled out on a large scale, then it should have been proven to be effective first.** [emphasis mine]

Here’s part of MacAskill’s discussion of open borders:

You might have some concerns about this idea. Won’t mass immigration be politically disruptive? Won’t it cause a “brain drain,” resulting in all the best talent from poor countries leaving, making those left behind worse off than before? Won’t it harm the native workers of the rich country, depressing wages and increasing unemployment?

There are good responses to each of these worries. Let’s take the objections in turn. **Regarding political disruption, it would improve politics in poor countries: dictators and corrupt governments would have far less**

power over their people, because those people would have a much easier opportunity to leave the country.

For the rich countries, the evidence is ambiguous. For example, most social scientists detect little effect of immigration on the size of government, even though immigrants are more in favor of the welfare state: there is a delay before they are eligible to vote, and even when they do have the vote, their turnout at elections is very low. ...

So, when talking about Scared Straight, MacAskill tells us that rigorous trials should be implemented wherever possible. When talking about open borders, his response to an objection about the consequences is a thought experiment! If you're thinking, "but how do we test the open borders?", *just open the borders with one small country first and see what happens.*

However, the best part of this thought experiment is that MacAskill seemingly has never heard about the Iron Curtain or North Korea. I'll quote [Wikipedia](#)⁵ :

With the closing of the Inner German border officially in 1952,[65] the city sector border in Berlin remained considerably more accessible than the rest of the border because it was administered by all four occupying powers. [60] Accordingly, Berlin became the main route by which East Germans left for the West.[66] East Germany introduced a new passport law on December 11, 1957, that reduced the overall number of refugees leaving East Germany, while drastically increasing the percentage of those leaving through West Berlin from 60% to well over 90% by the end of 1958.[65] Those actually caught trying to leave East Berlin were subjected to heavy penalties, but with no physical barrier and even subway train access to West Berlin, such measures were ineffective.[67] Accordingly, the Berlin sector border was essentially a "loophole" through which East Bloc citizens could still escape.[65] **The 3.5 million East Germans that had left by 1961 totaled approximately 20% of the entire East German population.**[67] ...

The emigrants tended to be young and well educated, leading to the brain drain feared by officials in East Germany.[48] Yuri Andropov, then the CPSU Director on Relations with Communist and Workers Parties of Socialist Countries wrote an urgent letter, in August 28, 1958, to the Central Committee about the significant 50% increase in the number of East German intelligentsia among the refugees.[68] Andropov reported that, while the East German leadership stated that they were leaving for economic reasons, testimony from refugees indicated that the reasons were more political than material.[68] He stated "the flight of the intelligentsia has reached a particularly critical phase." [68] SED leader Walter Ulbricht saw not only a problem from "brain drain", but also the Grenzgänger problem of 50,000 East Berliners working in West Berlin.[68] **Rural citizens disaffected after collectivization campaigns also caused the flight of tens of thousands of farmers, including one third of the wealthier farmers, leaving over 10% of East Germany's arable land fallow and resulting in food shortages.** [22] **The farmers that remained were disinclined to do more than produce for their own needs because fixed procurement prices meant little profit, and conspicuous production invited hasty inclusion in a collective or state farm.**[69] **The exodus intensified existing shortages of goods and services in the shortage economy.** [69] ...

Even with the Inner German border strengthening, emigration through Berlin began to swell, with 144,000 in 1949, 199,000 in 1960 and 207,000 in the first seven months of 1961 alone.[73] **Orderly planning had become almost impossible in East Germany, with entire towns existing without physicians, crops going unharvested and fifty-five-year-olds put to work running street cars.**[73] **The East German economy was on the verge of collapse.**[73] **With fears of drastic action in Berlin, on July 15, 1961 Ulbricht called a rare press conference, insisting that "no one has any intention of building a wall," but made clear that "the outflow has to stop."**[73] He added "it goes without saying that the so-called refugee camps in West Berlin"—the transit camps at which refugees were processed en route from West Berlin to West Germany—"will be closed down." [74]

On August 13, 1961, a barbed-wire barrier that would become the Berlin Wall separating East and West Berlin was erected by East Germany.[71] **Two days later, police and army engineers began to construct a more permanent concrete wall.**[74] The construction briefly caused fears of a military crisis, though only 11,000 western troops were located in Berlin compared to 500,000 Soviet troops surrounding them deployed in East Germany.[75] The completion of the Berlin Wall closed the biggest loophole in the Iron Curtain. It brought an end to a decade during which divided capital of the divided Germany was the easiest place for unauthorized east-to-west crossings. [76] **Along with the wall, the 830 miles (1,340 km) zonal border became 3.5 miles (5.6 km) wide on its East German side in some parts of Germany with a tall steel-mesh fence running along a "death strip" bordered by bands of plowed earth, to slow and to reveal the prints of those trying to escape, and mined fields.**[77]

Thereafter, only 5,000 crossed the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989. [emphasis mine]

Contrast that with MacAskill's:

Regarding political disruption, it would improve politics in poor countries: dictators and corrupt governments would have far less power over their people, because those people would have a much easier opportunity to leave the country.

11. Appendix

MacAskill:

With the help of collaborators, Kremer tested the different ICS programs one by one. First, he looked at the efficacy of providing schools with additional textbooks. Classrooms would often have only one textbook for a class of thirty, so it seemed obvious that providing more textbooks would help students learn. However, when Kremer tested this theory by comparing test scores between schools that received books and those that didn't, he found no effect for all but the most high-achieving of students. (He suggests the textbooks were written at too high a level for the children, especially considering they were in English, the pupils' third language after Swahili and their local languages.)

Next, Kremer looked at providing flip charts. The schoolchildren couldn't understand the textbooks, but having flip charts would allow teachers to tailor lessons to the specific needs of the students. Perhaps these would work better. Again, however, no effect.

Undaunted, he took a different approach. If providing additional materials didn't work, maybe increasing the number of teachers would. After all, most schools had only one teacher, catering to a large class. But, again, he found no discernible improvement from decreasing class sizes.

Over and over again, Kremer found that seemingly obvious programs to improve education just weren't working. But he persisted. He refused to believe there was simply no way to improve the education of children in Kenya. At that point, a friend at the World Bank suggested he test deworming.

Few people in developed countries know about intestinal worms: parasitic infections that affect more than one billion people worldwide. They aren't as dramatic as AIDS or cancer or malaria, because they don't kill nearly as many people as those other conditions. But they do make children sick, and can be cured for pennies: off-patent drugs, developed in the 1950s, can be distributed through schools and administered by teachers, and will cure children of intestinal worms for a year.

Kremer did an experiment to see whether treating children for these intestinal worms had an impact on education. The results were striking. "We didn't expect deworming to be as effective as it was," Kremer told me. "It turned out to be one of the most cost-effective ways of increasing school participation."

Absenteeism is a chronic problem in schools in Kenya, and deworming reduced it by 25 percent. In fact, every child treated spent an extra two weeks in school, and every one hundred dollars spent on the program provided a total of ten years of additional school attendance among all students. Enabling a child to spend an extra day in school therefore cost just five cents. It wasn't merely that deworming children "worked" at getting children into school. It worked incredibly well.

What's more, deworming didn't merely have educational benefits. It had health and economic benefits, too. Intestinal worms can cause a variety of maladies, including anemia, intestinal obstruction, and a suppressed immune system that can increase the risk of other diseases like malaria. Deworming decreases all these risks.

Moreover, when Kremer's colleagues followed up with the children ten years later, those who had been dewormed were working an extra 3.4 hours per week and earning an extra 20 percent of income compared to those who had not been dewormed. In fact, deworming was such a powerful program that it paid for itself through increased tax revenue.

By the time his work on deworming was published, Kremer's revolutionary new approach to development had spawned a following, with dozens of the brightest young economists running hundreds of trials of different development programs. Meanwhile, Glennerster had quit her job and become the executive director of the newly

founded Poverty Action Lab at MIT, where she used her knowledge of policy to ensure the research Kremer and his colleagues were conducting would have real-world impact.

In 2007, on the basis of this research, Kremer and Glennerster cofounded the nonprofit Deworm the World Initiative, which provides technical assistance to the governments of developing countries, enabling them to launch their own deworming programs. The charity has provided more than forty million deworming treatments, and the independent charity evaluator GiveWell regards them as one of the most cost-effective development charities.

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