

2014

# Global Justice and Charity: A Brief for a New Approach to Empirical Philosophy

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## Recommended Citation

Hassoun, Nicole, "Global Justice and Charity: A Brief for a New Approach to Empirical Philosophy" (2014). *Philosophy Faculty Scholarship*. 3.

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## **Global Justice and Charity: A Brief for a New Approach to Empirical Philosophy<sup>i</sup>**

### **1. Introduction**

What does global justice or charity require us to give to other people? There is a large theoretical literature on this question. There is much less experimental work in political philosophy relevant to answering it. Perhaps for this reason, this literature has yet to have any major impact on theoretical discussions of global justice or charity. There is, however, some experimental research in behavioral economics that has helped to shape the field and a few relevant studies by political philosophers. This paper reviews this research. Moreover, it argues that the little work that has been done can offer some methodological lessons to empirically engaged philosophers of many kinds. Finally, it suggests that there is reason for those interested in global ethics and charitable giving to consider doing new kinds of experimental and other empirical work in addition to traditional experimental philosophy.

### **2. Existing Work and Philosophical Methodology**

I take the literature on global justice and charitable giving to consist of studies that may be relevant for deciding how we should think about meeting needs. Most of the relevant studies focus on this issue through the lens of justice as opposed to charity. That is, they argue that providing aid is a requirement of fairness, not beneficence. This section will review these studies and examine how they have influenced debates about global justice. The next section outlines some new directions for future work on global justice and charitable.

In one of the most famous experiments on how people think about distributive justice, Norman Frohlich, Joe Oppenheimer, and C. Eavey had individuals decide the rules for remuneration for work that they would complete behind something like a veil of ignorance. Subjects were given information about how much they would earn when they were randomly assigned to different income classes based on their performance unless they could agree to a principle for distributing the earnings in a different way. Most subjects chose to provide a basic minimum income for everyone over several alternatives including maximizing the position of the least well off and maximizing the average and total income (Frohlich et. al., 1987).<sup>ii</sup> Although the authors intended to examine justice within a society, and everyone contributed equally to a common task, some have suggested that this provides a good model for properly global justice (Brock, 2009).

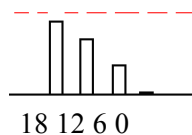
In his book *Principle of Social Justice*, David Miller draws on this experiment, and a few others, to suggest that we should take into account inequality in trying to meet needs as well as individuals' shortfall from some poverty line (Miller, 2003). Miller relies, in particular, on Frohlich et. al.'s experiment and on an experiment where subjects had to choose how to divide the payment for a task between two students who had contributed equally to completing it (Miller, 2003; Frohlich et. al, 1987). In the later experiment, subjects were told that one of the students needed extra money to buy books for a course. Most participants gave the needy student enough to buy the textbooks before splitting the rest equally (Lamm and Schwinger, 1980).<sup>iii</sup>

It is not clear, however, that these experiments show that people care about equality in meeting needs. H. Lamm and T. Schwinger's experiment only provides evidence that people care about helping people meet their needs before distributing unnecessary goods equally. Frohlich et. al.'s experiment only demonstrates that people are concerned about needs, not that they care about inequality. In her book *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account*, and several articles, Gillian Brock has even argued that this experiment shows that people just want to make sure everyone has enough. She believes it supports the hypothesis that people in a global original position under a veil of ignorance would likely choose a sufficiency principle of justice for ensuring that everyone can meet their basic needs (Brock, 2009). That is, Brock believes

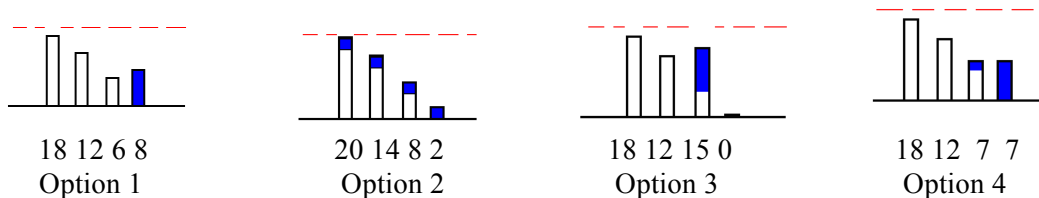
people only care that everyone has enough, they are not concerned with how people fare relative to each other at least above the threshold at which they can meet their basic needs.

Miller's principle might receive more support from the seminal paper on how people think about meeting needs in the behavioral social choice literature: Menahem Yaari and Maya Bar-Hillel's paper "On Dividing Justly" (Yaari and Bar-Hillel, 1984). Yaari and Bar-Hillel asked subjects how they would distribute fruits that contain different amounts of vitamins between two people with different needs, beliefs, and preferences. In one version of the experiment, subjects were told that these people have different abilities to metabolize the fruits and get needed vitamins from them but wanted to have as much vitamin as possible. In a second version, subjects were told that those to whom they could distribute fruit had different beliefs about the amounts of vitamins in the fruits and that information about the actual amount of the vitamins in the fruits did not exist. In a third version, the subjects were just told that the people to whom they could distribute fruit were willing to pay different amounts for the different fruits. Subjects tried to equalize access to vitamins given differences in individual metabolism, but only some of them tried to take into account differences in beliefs about the vitamins in the fruits or willingness to pay (though subjects were more likely to take into account willingness to pay than beliefs) (Yaari and Bar-Hillel, 1984; Gaertner and Schokkaert, 2012).

The evidence does not show that people care about inequality in unmet need, however. In helping people equally, subjects in Yaari and Bar-Hillel's experiment could also completely alleviate need. Moreover, an experiment reported in Nicole Hassoun's paper "Meeting Need" provides some reason to question the conclusion that people care about inequality in meeting need (Hassoun, 2009). The experiment was designed to arbitrate between several principles for distributing aid people might accept (including Miller's principle – summing individuals' shortfall from the poverty line with a measure of inequality between individuals' holdings -- as well as utilitarian, prioritarian and equalitarian principles). It shows that people do not accept Miller's principle. Rather people may care both about how much need they can fulfill and how many people they can help (amongst other things). People had to decide how to distribute vitamin to four people who each needed 20 milligrams of vitamin and all had less than that amount to start out with. This was the initial situation where the numbers indicate how much each person starts out with below the dotted 20 milligram line:



Participants were then asked to rank four possible policies that resulted in one of these four possible options:



This was the distribution of rankings of the options:

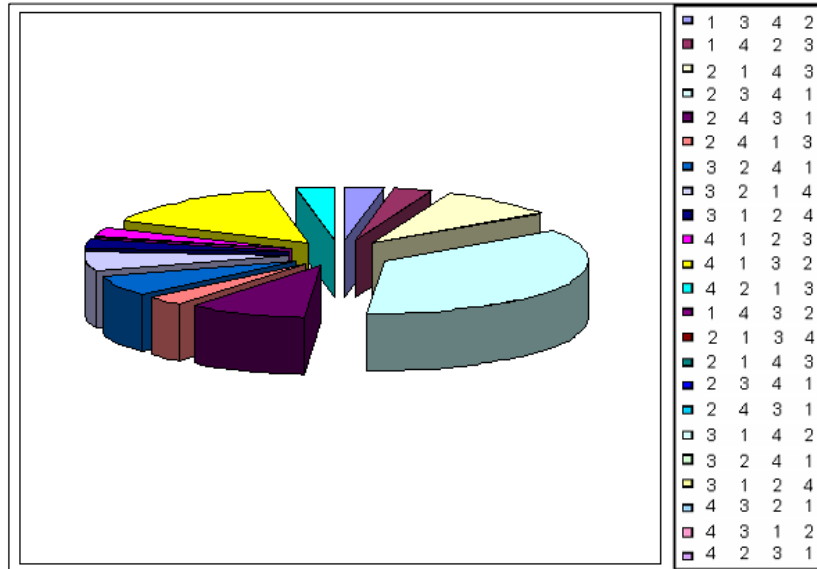


FIGURE 1. Experimental Results – Proportion of People with Each Possible Preference Order

Only a few participants endorsed the order Miller would likely choose (2, 4, 3, 1) (Hassoun, 2009). Rather, most endorsed a prioritarian principle to help the least well-off even at some cost to aggregate need satisfaction (Option 4).

Although I do not know of other published work by political philosophers on charitable giving, in particular, there is a good deal of experimental moral and political philosophy that may be of relevance to global ethics and charitable giving. For instance, many have considered individuals' intuitions about trolley cases and the doctrine of double effect (Liao, forthcoming; Di Nucci, forthcoming; Petrinovich and O'Neill, 1996; Schwitzgebel and Cushman, 2011; Greene, 2007; Green et. al, 2001; Greene et. al., 2004; Hauser, Young, and Cushman, 2008). These papers may be relevant for discussion of whether it is ever acceptable to withhold aid from some people to help others (e.g. in dire emergencies).<sup>iv</sup> One might wonder, for instance, whether it is reasonable for people to rely upon the doctrine of double effect in arguing that it is acceptable to with-hold aid from some as long as we do not intend to let them suffer. Others papers in experimental philosophy that may be relevant to global ethics and charitable giving consider individuals' intuitions about desert, virtue, and luck (Lopez et. al. 2009; Nadelhoffer et. al., forthcoming; Cushman et. al., 2007; Frieman and Nichols, forthcoming).<sup>v</sup>

There is also some other good work in behavioral economics focusing on a variety of rational choice games that might help us understand aid and investment decisions that transcend borders. In the minimal group paradigm, researchers sort people into groups and, even though the groups are based on morally irrelevant features, often find that there is a strong bias in people's judgments in favor of in-group members (Tajfel, 1970). These results may be important since global aid is usually given across group boundaries. The results depend, however, on whether or not subjects perceive themselves to be dependent on their in-group members (Karp et. al., 1993). Some of the results may also depend on the difficulty of processing membership relations (Rubin et. al., 2010). Because those giving aid globally generally have discretion over how much aid they are willing to give, dictator games may also provide some interesting information of willingness to aid. In dictator games, subjects can choose how much of a set amount of income (or other benefit) they want to give to others. Subjects keep the remaining amount. Meta-analysis suggests that more deserving recipients who have earned the benefit, or are more efficient, tend to receive more (Engel, 2011). If the dictator is older or is identified, she tends to give more. If the dictator earned the money, is from a developed country, and if she is a student or a child, she gives less on average. If a

group is making a decision, the game is repeated, the results are not public, and if the people in the study are socially connected, or recipients have a bigger endowment, dictators give less (Engel, 2011). Finally, trust games may also model international development assistance as investing in development may lead to productive partnerships in the future. In trust games, one subject receives an endowment that she can “invest” by giving some or all of the endowment to another subject. If the first subject decides to invest something, the recipient is then given some larger amount (the endowment may, for instance, be doubled) and can return some portion of this invested amount to the first subject. In some variants, a third party can punish the investing party using some of his or her own endowment. Individuals’ trustworthiness and willingness to trust others is impacted by a variety of factors. Some find, for instance, that religious background (or shared religious background) matters (Fehr et. al., 2003; Daniels and von der Ruhr, 2010; Anderson et. al., 2010). Others provide reason to question one or another of these conclusions (Lechner, 2013).

### 3. Directions for Future Research

There is a lot of room for experimental work on global justice and charitable giving. However, empirically-oriented political philosophers may do better to take their lead from those doing experimental, or other empirical, work in other disciplines than to try to emulate (most) experimental philosophy. There are several reasons for this.

The first reason empirically-oriented political philosophers might do well to take their lead from those doing experimental or other empirical work in other disciplines is that experimental methodology in these other disciplines is (generally) much more rigorous than most of the work in experimental philosophy. Like theoretical arguments empirical arguments can be better or worse and there is a lot of room for improvement in the experimental philosophical literature. Of course, philosophers are not scientists by training and trying to replicate empirical methodology in other disciplines will not ensure good results. Nevertheless, I believe that if we want to do science we should do it well, and it will help to pay careful attention to what good science looks like.

In any case, there are many useful methods available for answering important questions experimental philosophers might want to address in different disciplines. Experimental philosophy need not model itself primarily on the discipline of psychology. One can imagine experimental philosophy that adopts sociological, anthropological or other social scientific methods to answer important questions.

Consider, for instance, how it might be possible to model future research after some recent work in behavioral economics. Alexander Cappelen et. al.’s impressive paper “Rich Meet Poor – An International Fairness Experiment” matches poor and rich participants in different countries. Each participant completes a task for money – and the rich are generally better at completing this task than the poor. They can then choose to give some of their money to the other participant. Rich people are much less inclined to give to the poor but do give some aid. Cappelen et. al. provide a model taking into account nationality, self-interest, entitlements, and poverty that explains the data. They suggest that people are self-interested but think we should give some weight to giving people what they can earn – their “entitlements.” Cappelen et. al. argue that people value entitlements more the wealthier they are. They find that people are generally cosmopolitan in distributing their resources to individuals irrespective of nationality (Cappelen et. al., 2008). Another similar experiment used mouse-tracking technology to see how people chose between different possible distributions of meals between people that either maximized equality or efficiency (Palmer et. al., 2013). The authors found that people exhibited concern for both equality and efficiency and also seemed to have some concern for whether or not each person had a sufficient number of meals. It might be possible to test other theoretical explanations of why people act in the ways that they do in these experiments (including different hypotheses based on different moral or political theories) in a

similarly rigorous way. As long as one supposes individuals' actions tell us something about what they believe, similar experiments might reveal important information about individuals' intuitions regarding charitable giving and global justice.

Cappelen et. al.'s work illustrates another reason empirically-oriented political philosophers might do well to take their lead from those doing experimental or other empirical work in other disciplines: the subject matter most experimental philosophy considers is rather limited (which may explain why most experimental philosophers have adopted the methods of psychologists). Many experimental philosophy papers focus on whether "the folk" endorse different intuitions philosophers claim to have. This is arguably important for philosophical debates and for philosophical methodology, but there are other important empirical questions political philosophers might do well to examine.

Consider one study authored in part by a philosopher, economist, and computer scientist that attempts to avoid many of the criticisms of existing studies' methodology and, like Cappelen et. al.'s study, goes beyond a narrow focus on individuals' intuitions. Using a large database from Kiva, an online micro-finance platform, Nicole Hassoun, Emir Malikov, and Nathan Lubchenco examine how people choose to lend money (Hassoun et. al., 2013). Controlling for many factors such as the gender of those requesting loans, time of year, location of lenders, and purpose of the loan, they take the average income in a country as a proxy for the amount individuals need and funding time as a proxy for the amount of priority individuals place on aiding those in need. Hassoun et. al. find that loans to those who we expect need more are funded much more quickly than those who need less below some income threshold. Moreover, their results suggest that people care more about helping those further below some threshold of need until that threshold. It is noteworthy that Hassoun et. al.'s article does not focus on intuitions directly – but on how individuals act. It attempts to extract information about intuitions, but it is not clearly necessary to secure this information for this work to be valuable. If good accounts of global justice should be action-guiding, it is important to know whether there is a gap between individuals' beliefs and actions. Survey methods may tell us about the former and this study may tell us about the latter. Moreover, information about individuals' actions may be important on its own for philosophical theory. It may be possible to build, arbitrate between, and criticize theories by appeal to such evidence. Finally, knowing how people will give their money is important for those interested in how aid works in practice. Whatever one thinks of the preceding studies, what follows will examine a few new experiments philosophers might run employing a variety of social scientific methods to make the case for experimental work that does not just focus on folk intuitions.

#### **4. Illustrating the Proposal**

There are several ground-breaking proposals in global ethics that merit experimental or other kinds of empirical examination that goes far beyond asking the folk about their intuitions. Several global ethicists have tried to make the case for new ways of promoting global justice. Their theories fill a neglected gap between high level philosophical argument and empirical examination of institutional arrangements (Hassoun, 2012a). But making the case for any of these proposals requires empirical evidence. What follows will consider how we might test a few proposals to address pressing problems of global health, in particular.

Aidan Hollis and Thomas Pogge propose a new way of incentivising pharmaceutical companies to provide greater access to essential medicines. The Health Impact Fund would offer a second (voluntary) patent system for essential drugs and technologies (Hollis and Pogge, 2011). Under this system, companies would not be given a limited monopoly for their inventions. Rather, inventors would be rewarded based on how much their inventions contribute to ameliorating the global burden of disease (GBD). The hope is that this proposal can incentivize companies to extend access on essential medicines

more broadly by doing new research and development on, and lowering their prices for, these medicines (Hollis and Pogge, 2011).

Another way of addressing global health problems would be to expand web-based charitable giving (and lending) platforms more broadly. For instance, Kiva might focus on giving loans to purchase essential medicines. If returns to investment in human capital are even close to the returns on traditional investments, it should be possible to repay many of these loans. Alternately, individuals might prefer to give loans to institutions promoting global health (or support global justice in other ways) through a Kiva-like platform.<sup>vi</sup>

Yet another way to incentivize access to essential medicines is via a Global Health Impact rating system that evaluates pharmaceutical companies' contribution to alleviating the global burden of disease (Hassoun, 2013). Pharmaceutical companies may be rated on some estimate of their drugs' impact on mortality and morbidity (measured, e.g., in the number of Disability Adjusted Life Years averted). The rating system might support a Global Health Impact certification and labeling campaign. The idea is that the best companies, in a given year, will be given a license to use a Global Health Impact label on all of their products – everything from lip balm to food supplements. Highly rated companies will have an incentive to use the label to garner a larger share of the market.<sup>vii</sup>

It is worth considering how to test these proposals to see if they will work and some have already proposed such tests. Pogge hopes, for instance, to pilot a version of the proposal for one or two drugs in one country. The idea is to convince pharmaceutical companies to lower their prices for drugs for a particular disease (e.g. hemophilia) at select treatment centers in exchange for a payment based on the performance of drugs in reducing the burden of the disease on some measure (e.g. the number of “bleeds” reported by the treatment centers). To measure health impact, Pogge plans to track sales, evaluate education programs with surveys, and obtain stratified samples of drug usage.<sup>viii</sup> A successful pilot will demonstrate that it is possible to measure and reward companies for drug performance in a market setting in a way that can incentivize investments that increase drug impact. The pilot would observe companies' marketing efforts in response to the payment system and provide essential information about on how many dimensions it is necessary to measure different drugs' impact in different populations. To carry out the pilot, it would obviously be necessary to secure the data from treatment centers, and Pogge estimates that the pilot will cost at least half a million dollars to complete (Pogge, 2013).

Since Kiva can collect data on loan repayment and what features of borrowers people pay the most attention to in giving aid, it is easy to see how researchers working with Kiva to implement a new program for promoting health might study it. Researchers could create a study similar to the one discussed above to see whether people are willing to lend (or give) to those with serious health issues.

It is also easy to see ways to test the labeling proposal. There are already high-quality experimental studies of consumers' willingness to purchase ethically labeled goods – like Fair Trade coffee (Hainmueller et. al., 2011). It is possible to partner with grocery stores, or pharmaceutical companies, to see if consumers are willing to purchase key products with the Global Health Impact label. Alternately, survey studies, or experiments using online platforms like E-bay, are possible to see if consumers prefer products with the label to equivalent products without it (Hainmueller et. al., 2011).

## 5. Conclusion

Some might argue that what I am proposing can no longer be considered experimental philosophy.<sup>ix</sup> Even if this is so, I do not see why philosophers should not do it. Of course, it is difficult to do empirical work well (just as it is difficult to come up with good theories). It may be easier for philosophers to partner with those in other disciplines in doing this work or for there to be a division of labor. Nevertheless, there is

reason for experimental philosophers to consider doing new kinds of methodologically sophisticated experimental, and other empirical, work on global justice and charity in addition to traditional experimental philosophy.



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i Acknowledgments with-held.

ii A few have considered the prospects for extending the general hypothetical society paradigm much more broadly. Although not technically experimental philosophy (because one author is a lawyer and the other is in a business school) Gregory Mitchell and Philip Tetlock's paper "Experimental Political Philosophy: Justice Judgments in the Hypothetical Society Paradigm" is one of the first papers taking up this line of research outside of economics. Mitchell and Tetlock's paper focuses primarily on defending the methodology of using the hypothetical society paradigm as a way of making progress on moral issues (Mitchell and Tetlock, 2006). Although the proposal is interesting, it is very imprecise. Even if one is convinced that we should care about the reflective judgments of (only moderately or untutored) folk, one might worry that there are too many variables to try to control, to make much progress using this methodology.

iii See: (Miller, 1999).

iv If we do not intend to let people die in situations of scarcity, people may hold that it is acceptable to aid only those who have a good chance of recovery. But if they reflect on similar cases further, these studies suggest that their intuitions may change.

v Perhaps of more practical use, there is some interesting work on perceptions of poverty and the psychological traits that may inhibit individuals' ability to escape poverty. See, for instance: (Mullaninathan, 2013). There is also a lot of data on development assistance, individuals' perceptions of such assistance, how well aid matches communities' priorities in developing countries that raise deep ethical questions about whether the type and quantity of international assistance developing countries provide is appropriate. See, for instance: (Leo, 2013; AidData Beta, 2014; Binswanger-Mkhize et.al. ).

vi The idea of giving to individuals with health needs via Kiva was suggested to me in conversation by Neha Khanna, the idea has also been advanced on Kiva discussion boards. It might be possible for Kiva or its micro-finance partners to work with NGOs or community health organizations to offer these loans – some microfinance institutions already offer some kinds of health insurance.

vii If even a small percentage of consumers promote global health by purchasing Global Health Impact products, the incentive to use this label will be substantial (Hassoun, 2012a; Hassoun, 2013). The market for over-the-counter painkillers alone is worth approximately US\$2 billion per year (Hassoun, 2012a).

viii In designing a good study, it is important to track drug adherence as well as a variety of other factors that might influence the results to control for other potential causes of impact to insure that medicines do not appear more effective than they are in actuality.

ix Some argue that even traditional experimental philosophy is of no value to philosophy in general.

Whether one thinks that these studies are relevant will depend on one's theoretical presuppositions. They may, for instance, be useful for building, criticizing or justifying philosophical work if one believes that it is important to appeal to broadly shared intuitions of the kind reported in most experimental philosophical work. I do not have the space to engage with the general worries here, so will simply suppose such studies may have something to offer philosophy.