Thinking About Effectiveness
More from the 80,000 starter guide

Middlebury Effective Altruism

Slides available on go/easlides

Oct 2022
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2. Effectiveness
3. Ethical Framework of Impact
4. Additional discussion questions
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Top three career facts

1. You will spend more time on your career than everything except sleep.

2. You will have a much bigger impact on the world in some career than others.

3. We live in a time where there are many pressing issues, and one where one person can make a lot of difference.
Top three career facts

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80,000 hours’s four career rules

1. Solve a pressing issue: Something with scale and understaffed
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2. Find a more effective solution
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4. Find work that suits you.
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Impact can be measured

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Impact can be measured

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- One of the key drivers behind the scientific revolution is that the physical world around us can be studied through experiments.
- So it’s worth re-iterating this again: Your career impact can be measured.
Day to day examples

- If you stop using plastic bags for the rest of your life, you reduce your carbon footprint by about 100kg.
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- If you stop using plastic bags for the rest of your life, you reduce your carbon footprint by about 100kg.
- If you take one less round trip flight to London, you reduce your carbon footprint by 1400kg.
Policy examples

- Drug Abuse Resistance Education: 10 million dollars annual budget, doesn't work at all.
- Scared Straight: Every dollar spent caused $200 worth of damage
Policy examples: The number one graph [link]
Being good at your job matters [link]

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field &amp; outcome</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Share of output from the top...</th>
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<td>Hunter, Schmidt, &amp; Judiesch 1990</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<td>Output in &quot;medium&quot; complexity jobs among applications e.g. cook</td>
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<td>Papers coauthored by mathematicians with at least 133 publications</td>
<td>Clauset et al. 2009</td>
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<td>Papers written by scientist (whole career)</td>
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<td>Weeks in Billboard Hot-100 (1970-2018) by musician, among artists with at least 282 weeks in these charts</td>
<td>Tauberg 2018</td>
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<td>Box Office Gross by US top-200 movie director</td>
<td>Tauberg 2018</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>Citations to scientists (whole career)</td>
<td>Sinatra et al. 2016</td>
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<td>Income (worldwide, 2005)</td>
<td>Anand &amp; Segal 2014</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeks on NYT Fiction Bestseller list by author with at least 6 weeks on that list</td>
<td>Tauberg 2018</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Startup founder equity by company, among Y Combinator companies</td>
<td>80,000 Hours 2014</td>
<td>&gt;80%</td>
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Being good at your job matters

- Replacing a teacher from the bottom 5% with one from the top 5% results in an additional 1.4 million worth of earnings for the average classroom.
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How to define social impact

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- “Your social impact is given by the number of people whose lives you improve and how much you improve them, over the long term.”
- “Social impact is about promoting total expected wellbeing — considered impartially, over the long term — without sacrificing anything that might be of comparable moral importance”
Two ways to have more social impact

- Helping people to a greater degree
- Helping more people
Promoting well-being

- “Promoting” implies a positive action.
- When thinking about ethical behaviors we often think about stuff that we *should not do.*
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- How do we trade off different forms of well-being with each other?
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- Small diversion to talk about scope insensitivity.
“Once upon a time, three groups of subjects were asked how much they would pay to save 2,000 / 20,000 / 200,000 migrating birds from drowning in uncovered oil ponds. The groups respectively answered $80, $78, and $88.”
Scope insensitivity

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We do a very bad job at conceptualizing large numbers.
Expected value

\[ E[X] = \int_{\Omega} xp(x)dx \]
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- Fancy average

If I have a large number of college students who have an expected lifetime earnings of $5 million dollars each. The idea is that, after they die, I could average their actual lifetime earnings, it should come down to about $5 million each. Suppose that I'm a good teacher, then maybe I could increase their expected earnings to $6 million dollars.
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Expected value with discrete choices

- In the case with lifetime earnings, expected impact makes a lot of sense because there is a continuum of possibilities.
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Now think about this scenario: You have a group of 20 people sitting in a room.

We are going to flip a coin. If it comes up as heads, everyone dies. If it comes up as tails, no one dies.

Suppose you worked really hard and changed the rules. Now you have to flip two coins, and everyone dies if and only if the two coins both come up as heads.

Before, ten people are expected to die. Now, only five people are expected to die.

Did I save five lives?
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Issues and Results from Expected Value
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Go forth and discuss