The Ethics of Giving: Philosophers' Perspectives on Philanthropy. Edited by Paul Woodruff. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 224. Price £25.49.)

Reviewed by Theron Pummer (University of St Andrews)

This volume advances the ethics of charitable giving in a variety of interesting and significant ways. It is comprised of six chapters by contributors, as well as an introduction and afterword by the editor.

A recurring question throughout the volume concerns the extent to which non-consequentialist ethical theories can support effective altruism (pp. 3-4). Though it is difficult to answer this question without a shared definition of effective altruism, it seems a key philosophical issue here is whether, when, and how non-consequentialist theories would support the impartial maximization of well-being (assuming no constraints are violated).

Paul Woodruff, the volume's editor, provides handy summaries of each of the chapters in his introduction (pp. 4-11). Rather than reproduce these summaries, I will briefly highlight some points I found particularly noteworthy.

Thomas E. Hill Jr. explores the implications of Kantian ethics for philanthropy. Many are aware that, on a Kantian view, our duty to help others is *imperfect* in that it does not determine how, when, or how much to help (p. 22). I suspect far fewer are aware of the passages Hill cites suggesting that Kant – in my view rightly – invokes a strict and determinate duty to help in emergency rescue cases, as when you can save a drowning child at little cost to yourself (p. 27). This is striking, especially since some suitably specified cases of charitable giving are arguably (relevantly like) emergency rescue cases. At least, it is difficult to see how one could fail to help in such cases if one truly made the happiness of others an end of one's own, which, according to Kant, one has a strict duty of virtue to do (p. 22).

Christine Swanton presents a version of virtue ethics which, she argues, can resolve a number of paradoxes of beneficence. The latter include the paradox that arises when a number of individual contributions together have a good effect and yet none of them makes any difference to securing the good effect (p. 67). According to Swanton, when the details of such cases are spelled out, we can determine whether a given failure to contribute is subsumed under a relevant vice concept, such as 'parasitical', 'callous', or 'unfair'; if it is, that counts against failing to contribute (p. 68). I am not fully convinced of this 'Thick Concept Solution', but it is certainly worthy of attention.

Jeff McMahan works through a series of hypothetical rescue cases in order to assess the plausibility of the view – which Horton (2017) and I (2016) have defended – that it can be impermissible to give to a less effective charity rather than a more effective charity, even when it is permissible not to give at all. In one sort of case, one can first either incur a personal cost to do some good, or not; if one incurs the cost, one can then choose whether to do more good at no additional personal cost. Here McMahan finds that even if it is permissible not to incur the personal cost, if one does, it is impermissible to do less rather than more good. However, cases of this sort are structurally unlike charitable giving (pp. 90-93). In another sort of case, one faces a single choice in which one can either incur a personal cost to do some good, incur the same personal cost to do more good, or incur no personal cost by doing no good at all. Many cases of charitable giving are of this sort. However, McMahan finds this latter sort of case more puzzling, ultimately suggesting that it may be *wrong* yet *not impermissible* to incur the personal cost to do the lesser good (pp. 99-101). In the chapter he concedes that he is not confident his suggestion is coherent. Thinking about it, as well as about the proposals of Horton and others, has led me more recently (2019) to propose a different solution, according to which it is wrong (and impermissible) yet *conditionally permissible* to incur the personal cost to do the lesser good. That is, it is permissible

conditional on not doing the greater good. McMahan has asked me to say in this review that he now thinks this solution is the best way to understand the type of view he was groping toward in his own undeveloped suggestion.

Elizabeth Ashford puts forward a view that brings into harmony two seemingly conflicting ways of thinking about our duties to those in severe poverty. According to one approach, we have a duty to give to effective aid agencies to save or transform the lives of people in severe poverty. According to the other, we have a duty to combat structural injustices that cause and sustain severe poverty. Ashford argues convincingly that we are under both of these duties, and that proponents of each approach should embrace the other (pp. 141-145). There remains the difficult question of what, in practice, to prioritize, as resources spent on saving lives often could have been used to combat structural injustices instead, and vice versa. But we should not allow the difficulty of this question to result in inaction.

Brandon Boesch argues, in the spirit of Bernard Williams's 'integrity objection' to utilitarianism, that reasons constituting one's moral commitments and identities should factor into one's decisions about where to donate (alongside impartial considerations of utility). In the penultimate section of his chapter, Boesch discusses fundraising strategies, such as the Ice Bucket Challenge, in which one is 'challenged' by someone else via social media to contribute to a particular cause (pp. 170-173). Here he makes what seems to me an underappreciated point, namely that contributions made in response to such challenges are very often done neither on the basis of *one's own* moral commitments nor on the basis of impartial cost-effectiveness.

William MacAskill, Andreas Mogensen, and Toby Ord claim that giving to charity results in far less loss of well-being than we intuitively believe and that giving to charity can do much more good than we intuitively believe (p. 180). They support these claims with

empirical evidence from psychology and economics. If our beliefs about giving were revised to match this evidence, many of us would, I wager, give more and give better.

Woodruff's afterword discusses various duties of justice to give to charity. With Hill (pp. 33-34) and Ashford (pp. 107, 111), Woodruff claims that, insofar as the rich have benefited from unjust economic structures, they have a duty of restitution to transfer some of their wealth to the poor (pp. 205-208). The suggestion is not merely that the rich are not morally entitled to all of the resources in their de facto possession, for that is consistent with it being the case that no one is morally entitled to these resources – and one might then argue, as McMahan notes (pp. 80-81), that these resources ought to be used to do the most good, impartially considered. The suggestion is also that the poor *are* morally entitled to a portion of the resources in the de facto possession of the rich. Transferring to people what they are owed may or may not coincide with producing the impartially best outcome. What to do when duties of justice and duties of beneficence conflict is in many cases a difficult question. Whether and how considerations of moral entitlement interact with prerogatives not to incur substantial personal costs is a further difficult question. Woodruff and other contributors to this volume have here put their fingers on an important and underexplored set of issues in the ethics of giving. Indeed, the volume as a whole is highly thought-provoking.

REFERENCES

Horton, Joe. (2017) 'The All or Nothing Problem', *The Journal of Philosophy* 114: 94–104.

Pummer, Theron. (2016) 'Whether and Where to Give', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 44: 77–95.

Pummer, Theron. (2019) 'All or Nothing, but If Not All, Next Best or Nothing', *The Journal of Philosophy* 116: 278–291.