

Replaceability, Career Choice, and Making a Difference

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Accepted: 21 May 2013 / Published online: 6 June 2013
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Keywords Practical ethics · Career choice · Making a difference · Replaceability · Harm · Integrity

There are few decisions in life more important than one's choice of career. Typically, one's career choice determines how one spends over 80 000 hours—a sizable proportion of one's waking life. One's choice of career can therefore be the determining factor in whether one's life is fruitful or worthless; happy or miserable; admirable or contemptible.

This decision is not only important, however. It's also common. Almost all people living in rich countries, and certainly those who are lucky enough to be university-educated, are able to make decisions about how they will earn a living. And, as socioeconomic conditions improve throughout the world, the number of people worldwide who have a genuine ability to choose between jobs will only increase.

Remarkably, however, very little philosophical work has been done on the ethics of career choice. This is something of a disappointment on the part of practical ethics, insofar as we should expect that discipline to offer advice about one of the most important decisions of our lives. But it is also unfortunate for normative ethics, because consideration of the ethics of career choice throws up some interesting and far-reaching theoretical issues.

The small literature which does exist has focused primarily on whether it is permissible to pursue a non-altruistic rather than an altruistic career.¹ I focus on a different question: within the domain of altruistic career paths, which careers are ethically preferable to which others? This question is important because, as I shall show, which altruistic career path a person chooses makes a great deal of difference to the world. But the question is also important simply because many young graduates care deeply about it.² For these people, choosing a merely permissible career is not sufficient: they want to know how best to live their lives.

¹For arguments against the idea that choosing a non-altruistic career is permissible, see (Buss 2006; Care 1984; Unger 1996, p.151) Interestingly, one of Karl Marx's first essays was on career choice (1975). Marx also argued that one is morally required to pursue an altruistic career path; though this essay is no evidence of his mature thought. Bernard Williams gives an argument that one could use to defend the view that it's permissible to choose a non-altruistic career in (1973, pp.97–118). Other literature on the ethics of career choice includes (Perlman 2000), who uses the example of choice of legal careers as a critique of some theories within the ethics of law. There has also been a small debate about whether it's true that many professionals, within certain professions, ought to retire immediately. See (Smilansky 2005, 2007; Lenman 2007).

²For example, in a survey by The Guardian, over 70 % of students said that ethical considerations were crucial in choosing an employer. See (Robinson 2006) .

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In section 1, I introduce what I take to be the common-sense answer to this question. According to this view, careers in the charity sector are the paradigm ethical careers. The reason generally given to justify this view is that these careers ‘make a difference’.

In section 2, I show that this reason and this view are in tension. I introduce the idea that, as an alternative to charity work, one could deliberately pursue a lucrative career in order to donate a substantial proportion of their earnings to the best causes.³ I then argue in favour of what I call the *Weak Claim*:

Weak Claim: typically, it is ethically preferable to pursue philanthropy through a higher paid but morally innocuous career than to pursue a career in the charity sector.

I define a career to be ‘morally innocuous’ if there is no strong non-consequentialist reason against pursuing that career.

From section 3 onwards, I go further and argue in favour of what I call the *Strong Claim*:

Strong Claim: often, it is ethically preferably to pursue philanthropy through a higher paid but morally controversial career than to pursue philanthropy through a lower paid but morally innocuous career.

Where I define a career to be ‘morally controversial’ if there is *typically* a strong non-consequentialist reason against pursuing that type of career.

Before I begin, I’ll make two clarifications. First, this paper is not concerned with what one is *obligated* to do or even what one has most *all-things-considered* reason to do. It’s focused purely on the question of what one has most *altruistic* reason to do: what one should do, insofar as one should be altruistic, or insofar as one wants to be altruistic. It’s of course plausible that prudential concerns give one strong reasons for action, and that any course of action that involved too great a personal sacrifice could not be morally obligatory. But such concerns would not affect the ranking of careers in terms of which one has most altruistic reason to choose, or what I call “ethical preferability”.

Second, I should note that, because the bulk of my argument is concerned with ‘making a difference’, this paper is consequentialist in flavour. But the arguments I give cannot be dismissed as merely an exercise in applied consequentialism. Every moral theory should recognise that making a difference is *one* important moral consideration. It just so happens that, in the case of the ethics of career choice, it is often the dominant consideration. Or so I shall argue.

1 The Common-Sense View

I understand the common-sense view of ethical careers to be defined largely by paradigms. A career in the charity sector is the central paradigm.⁴ But some public sector jobs, such as in social work or state-school teaching, and some private sector jobs, such as in social enterprises, or in the social responsibility arm of a large corporation, are also regarded as ethical career choices. In this paper I will focus on charity work, but my argument could equally apply to the other paradigm ethical careers.

³ (Unger 1996, p.151) suggests a similar concept in passing, though advocates it on somewhat different grounds than I develop here.

⁴ This is clearly the case, for example, in (Burrows 2006), and in the many ethical careers websites that one can find on-line.

Why is charity work viewed as the most ethical career choice? The justification for this view is often put in terms of the positive impact that one has on the world by pursuing such a career. A common slogan is that these careers ‘make a difference’. Alternatively, they ‘make the world a better place’.⁵ This is not the only consideration invoked in public discourse about ethical careers, but it’s the most prominent. So I’ll begin by considering how this justification fits with the common-sense view it is taken to support.

2 Establishing the Weak Claim

In fact, the common-sense view and the common-sense justification for it are in tension. Charity work is not, in general, the best way to make the world a better place. To see this, consider the following example:

The Graduate’s Dilemma

Sophie is a successful, but otherwise fairly typical, graduate of a good university. She has two job offers, and so has two careers available to her. First, she could pursue a career in the charity sector, working as a doctor in the developing world, making an average lifetime income of \$50 000/year. Second, she could pursue a lucrative career, earning an expected average of \$150 000/year over her lifetime and donating 2/3 of those earnings to the best charities that she knows of. She would still live very comfortably, on an average income of \$50 000/year.

Like Sophie, graduates commonly face the choice whether to forsake a high-paying private sector job in favour of a lower paying job in the charity sector. In what follows, the precise salaries that she could earn in these different careers won’t matter: all that matters is that, by pursuing a career in charity work, she is forsaking a significantly more lucrative career elsewhere. And, of course, there is no guarantee that she will succeed in that lucrative career if she chose to pursue it. But what is relevant for my argument is that the *expected* earnings of that career are much higher than the expected earnings of the career in the charity sector. Looking at the typical earning prospects of graduates in different career paths, this assumption seems warranted.⁶

Contemporary guides to ethical careers recommend charity work as the ethical career choice. But, on grounds of making a difference, that isn’t right. Sophie would make a far greater difference by taking the lucrative career and becoming a philanthropist than by becoming a charity worker. Four arguments support this claim.

⁵ See, for example, (Shatkin 2008), which is steeped in this sort of language.

⁶ Finding reliable information on *expected* earnings of different career paths is surprisingly difficult. Salary rankings are easy to come by (e.g. prospects.ac.uk), but they neglect to take into account: i) average career length and attrition rate; ii) non-wage compensation like business ownership and stock options; iii) necessary work-related expenses (e.g. more expensive housing); iv) fluctuations in the financial success of different industries over time; v) substantial variation of earnings within broad categories of careers. However, a career in charity work typically starts with a salary of \$32 000, rising to \$100 000 at the most senior levels (using data on “Charity Officer” from prospects.ac.uk). A career in some areas of finance often starts at \$50 000 (excluding bonuses of up to 100 %) rising to hundreds of thousands or millions per year (using data on “Financial Trader” “Investment Analyst” and “Investment banker” from prospects.ac.uk); law, consultancy and other areas of finance are similar, though not quite as high-earning. Because the earnings in senior positions in such careers are so much higher than the earnings for charity workers in senior positions, the assumption that, for university graduates, the *expected* lifetime earnings from deliberately pursuing a lucrative career is several times greater than the lifetime earnings from charity work seems to me to be conservative (though the difference in *median* earnings might well be less than a factor of 3). However, as noted, even if the ratio of earnings between the two careers were significantly less than that, my argument would still go through.

2.1 The Financial Discrepancy Argument

The variation in pay across career-types is significant. If, in the example above, Sophie were to take the lucrative job, her donations could not only pay for someone else to be in her shoes, she could pay for another charity worker as well. So she would make twice as great a difference by earning and donating than if she herself had worked for the charity.

2.2 The Fungibility Argument

Money is a fungible resource: it can be used to further almost any cause. This provides another strong reason in favour of philanthropy. The discrepancy in impact among different means of doing good in the world is vast. A philanthropist can choose to fund only those causes that she believes are the very best. In contrast, if one pursues charity work, one is more limited: it is unlikely that one can choose to work for the very best cause there is.

To see the importance of this issue, suppose, for example, that improving health in the developing world is the most important cause for Sophie to further. According to the *Disease Control Priorities Project*, the very best health programs produce 60 times as much benefit, with the same amount of resources, as the median health program. (Jamison et al. 2006) So, if Sophie had the choice between pursuing philanthropy and working for the median developing world health charity, she would save many times more lives through philanthropy even if she could only donate half the salary that she would have been paid as a charity worker.

2.3 The Uncertainty Argument

The fungibility of money also generates a further argument. When one sets out on one's career, one should not be certain about what the most important causes are. Over the next 30 years, we should expect to encounter both new empirical evidence and new ethical arguments that should alter our beliefs in which cause it is best to pursue. We should also expect new means of doing good to arise. So we should expect that our current best guess concerning the most important cause to pursue is not the same as what will be our best guess in 30 years' time. Perhaps global poverty alleviation is the current best means by which to benefit others; but in the future we might learn that a method for combating climate change enables us to do even more with the resources we have. Given this uncertainty, there is a reason in favour of pursuing a career that is flexible with respect to different causes.

Philanthropy is flexible with respect to causes. If one discovers that one hasn't been funding the very best cause, one can easily switch one's donations; whereas charity work is much less flexible. It would be difficult, for example, to move from a career in poverty alleviation to a career in green technology, but relatively easy to move from funding poverty alleviation to funding green technology.

2.4 The Replaceability Argument

The fourth reason why Sophie will do more good as a philanthropist is that she is *replaceable* as a charity worker, but not as a philanthropist. Intuitively, we would think that, if Sophie saves ten lives per week as a charity worker in the developing world, then the difference that she makes to the world is equal to ten lives saved every week. On reflection, however, that isn't the case. Careers in the charity sector are highly competitive. So, if Sophie decides not to become a charity worker, someone else will be employed in the job that she would have been in, doing the same work. Of course, if the charity's assessment

criteria are good, the person who takes her place will not do the job quite as well as she would have done. But they will not be useless. So, whether or not she takes the charity job, a proportion of the benefit that the job produces will happen anyway. The difference she would make is merely the difference between the value of what she would do through her work and the value of what her replacement would do. Perhaps her replacement, a slightly less efficient worker than her, would save nine lives per week. If so, then the difference that Sophie makes would be equivalent to only one life saved per week.⁷

In contrast, if Sophie were to decide against becoming a philanthropist, it's very unlikely that anyone would become one in her place. Of course, lucrative careers are also extremely competitive. So someone would take her job in that lucrative career. But, in almost all lucrative careers, the average worker donates only a very small percentage of their income, and rarely donates it to the best causes. So the difference that Sophie makes by becoming a philanthropist is nearly equal to the value of her donations, assuming that a typical worker would replace her. In other words: choosing to become a charity worker merely changes who works for the charity; whereas choosing to become a philanthropist means that additional charity workers are hired.

2.5 The Weak Claim

The above four arguments show not only that one can make a greater difference through philanthropy than through charity work. The arguments given above are multiplicative in force, not additive, and they show that one can make a *far* greater difference. Conservatively, I'd guess that a typical graduate could easily donate enough, as a philanthropist working in a lucrative but morally innocuous career, to fund two charity workers, each working for a charity ten times more cost-effective than the charity which she would have been working for; whilst 50 % of the benefit produced through her job, had she gone into charity work, would happen anyway. Using these conservative figures, a typical graduate would make a difference 40 times greater than she would have done by becoming a philanthropist rather than a charity worker.

Because, by definition, there are typically no strong non-consequentialist moral reasons against pursuing a morally innocuous career, the ranking of morally innocuous careers in terms of ethical preferability should be determined almost entirely by how great a difference one can make. So the *Weak Claim* is justified: typically, it is ethically preferable to pursue philanthropy through a morally innocuous career than to pursue a career in the charity sector. Though I don't wish to commit myself on the question of how wide the class of lucrative but morally innocuous careers is, there are some clear examples, such as many careers within engineering, pharmacy, pilotry, private medicine, actuarial work and entrepreneurship.

Before we move on, it's worth noting that the above arguments do not just apply to people like Sophie, who has the potential to take an extremely lucrative career, and who is concerned about global poverty. The argument applies just as well to someone who has more typical job prospects, just as long as they have the opportunity to pursue either a conventional 'ethical' career or a more lucrative career. And the argument is almost completely cause-neutral: money can pay for most things, and so the argument in favour of philanthropy is successful almost whatever one thinks is the most important cause, be it poverty, animal suffering, climate change, or even anti-capitalism.

⁷ Depending on empirical matters, the replacement issue can be considerably more complex than described above. I will not go into the implications of different possible empirical situations, because they do not affect the basic philosophical point.

3 Motivating the Strong Claim

We have seen that the *Weak Claim* is well-supported. But can we go further than this? Morally controversial careers can often, for that very reason, be more lucrative than morally innocuous careers: fewer people wish to pursue such a career, and so the wages for such careers have to be higher. In those cases where one could earn significantly more through a morally controversial career than through a morally innocuous career, when, if ever, is it ethically preferable for one to pursue philanthropy through the morally controversial career?

First, I'll distinguish "morally controversial" careers from what I'll call *reprehensible* careers. Morally controversial careers include careers such as working for a petrochemical company, working for a company involved in the arms industry, and some careers within finance, such as those that involve speculating on wheat, thereby increasing price volatility and disrupting the livelihoods of the global poor. The second class I'll call reprehensible careers: these include working as a hit man, a concentration camp guard, a drug dealer or a child trafficker. The non-consequentialist reasons are typically much stronger against reprehensible careers. Partly for this reason, reprehensible careers are typically illegal, whereas the morally controversial careers are not.

One might legitimately worry that any argument that has as its conclusion that young graduates ought to pursue a career as a hit man is a *reductio* of its premises. And, indeed, I do not wish to defend philanthropy through reprehensible careers: the reasons against pursuing such a career are overdetermined. On pure consequentialist grounds alone, it's extremely unlikely that a morally sensitive individual could actually bring themselves to pursue such a career; and, even if they could, doing so would impair their ability to influence others to also pursue philanthropy as a vocation and indeed risks sullyng the whole idea. But, further, as we shall see, there are strong non-consequentialist reasons against pursuing such a career that don't obtain against pursuing philanthropy through a morally controversial career.

In what follows, I'll consider two sorts of non-consequentialist reasons against pursuing philanthropy through morally controversial careers. The first is victim-centred: based on the idea that some careers involve harming others. The second is agent-centred: based on the idea that some careers involve a violation of the worker's integrity.

In both cases, I'll give conditions under which these reasons do not hold. The conditions are sufficiently common that I take the *Strong Claim* to be well-supported.

4 Harm-Based Reasons

In general, one might think that the pursuit of philanthropy through a morally controversial career is analogous to the classic *Transplant*⁸ counterexample to consequentialism, in which one considers whether it's permissible to kill one person in order to transplant her organs and save the lives of five other people. In this case, one has the choice to act against the interests of one person, in order to satisfy the interests of five others. According to both non-consequentialism and common-sense intuition, it is not permissible to do this. The reason it is not permissible to do this is victim-based: the reason is based on the harm that one inflicts.

However, in many cases, pursuing philanthropy through a morally controversial career is not like the *Transplant* case. I'll give two conditions in which this is so.

⁸ Raised in (Foot 1967, p.23), and discussed further in (Thomson 1985).

4.1 Giving all Purported Victims a Benefit

The main reason why philanthropy through a morally controversial career can be unlike the *Transplant* case is that, typically, lucrative but morally controversial careers are competitive. There are more people who want such jobs than there are jobs. So if one decides not to pursue a certain lucrative but morally controversial career, then someone else would pursue it in one's stead. This means that, sometimes, pursuing philanthropy through a morally controversial career is actually in the interests of all the people that you are supposedly harming.

Consider the decision whether to work as an engineer for a petrochemical company—a paradigm unethical career. Let's suppose that the typical petrochemical company harms others by adding to the overall production of CO₂ and thereby speeding up anthropogenic climate change. Let's suppose that Sophie has the option of pursuing such a career, and let's suppose that it would be more lucrative for her than any other career, thereby enabling her to donate more. Would the fact that she would be working for a company that harms others through producing CO₂ be a reason against her pursuing that career?

It wouldn't. When one emits CO₂, one harms everyone in the world, including some future people, by a small amount. So if one acts such that the sum total of released CO₂ is lower, then one has slightly benefitted everyone in the world—one has done a good thing. This is true even if one produces CO₂ as a means to reducing the sum total of CO₂ released by the world.⁹

As noted, if Sophie were not to take the petrochemical engineering job, someone else would. So Sophie only makes others worse off if more CO₂ is produced as a result of her working in that job than as a result of her replacement working in that job. But it seems unlikely that Sophie's taking that job would result in more CO₂ being produced than would have been produced had her replacement taken the job. She might even cause less CO₂ to be emitted. After all, Sophie has an altruistic character: she takes this job in order to donate as much money as possible, in order to help other people as much as she can. She therefore cares about the fact that CO₂ emissions harm others. The typical petroleum engineer, in contrast, does not. So it's possible that, without compromising her aims as a philanthropist, she could work in such a way that she produces less CO₂ than her replacement would have done. And, even if she cannot accomplish that, there is no reason to think she will produce more CO₂ than her replacement would have done.

So there is no-one who is made worse off if she decides to pursue that career. But some people are better off: namely, the beneficiaries of her charitable donations. And, if she is able to produce less CO₂ than her replacement would have done, then those set to be harmed from climate change are also made better off.

Given this, it would be perverse to claim that it is ethically preferable for Sophie to choose a morally innocuous career instead, if it is substantially less lucrative. The harm-based reason we are considering was a reason against morally controversial careers because of the effects of such careers on the worst off people in the world. But, if we were to ask those worst-off people what is in their interest for Sophie to do, and if they were sufficiently well-informed, then every one of them would ask for Sophie to take the petrochemical engineering job: they would have some chance of being made better off (through her

⁹ This is why we normally think that it's permissible to emit CO₂ if one successfully offsets one's emissions—indeed, if one offsets more than one omits, then one has made some people better off while making no-one worse off.

donations, and perhaps through her ability to produce less CO₂ than her replacement would have done), and no risk of being made worse off.

This consideration means that, in those cases in which one can ensure that one does no less harm than the person who would have been in one's shoes, philanthropy through a morally controversial career is not analogous to the *Transplant* case. A more apt analogy is to the case of *Jim and the Indians*,¹⁰ in which Jim can kill one person, who would have been killed anyway, in order to save the lives of 19 others. In this case, Jim makes no-one worse off, but some people better off, by killing one person. In this case, therefore, it's ethically preferable for Jim to kill the one. Indeed, even Bernard Williams, who used this example as part of an argument against utilitarianism (which would straightforwardly require Jim to kill the one person), agreed with this conclusion. He wrote:

But if (as I suppose) the utilitarian is probably right in this case, that is not to be found out just by asking the utilitarian's questions. (Williams 1973, p.117)

That is, even Williams thinks that Jim should kill the one person. His objection to utilitarianism, in this case, was not that it gets the wrong answer, but rather that it makes the answer too obvious and straightforward: it can't explain why the case is morally problematic, or why Jim ought to feel moral conflict.

4.2 Forseen but Unintended Side-Effects

Often, however, your decision to pursue philanthropy through a morally controversial career will not be in the interests of all the people you affect. For, even if you are able to do less harm overall in your career than your replacement would have done, you still might change *who* gets harmed. In which case, by your actions, some people are made worse off who wouldn't have otherwise been made off. If so, then the situation is unlike *Jim and the Indians*.

However, there is a second condition under which it can be ethically preferable to pursue philanthropy through a morally controversial career. Of those careers that are morally controversial because they involve causing harm, many do not involve *intentionally* causing harm. Rather, the harm caused is a foreseen but unintended side-effect of one's action.

If the harm one causes in one's career is merely an unintended side-effect of one's career choice, then the situation is not analogous to the *Transplant* case, in which one intentionally kills one person in order to save five. Rather, the situation can be analogous to one of two cases. The first is the *Trolley*¹¹ case, where one has the option to switch the tracks of a runaway train, redirecting the threat from the train and saving the five who would have been run over, but running over and killing one other person instead. In the *Trolley* case, it seems clear that it is ethically preferable to switch the tracks and kill the one rather than do nothing: the fact that you mitigate the harm gives you a reason that outweighs the fact that you act to change who is harmed. The second case is the *Tactical Bombing* case,¹² in which one can end a war early by destroying an ammunition factory, foreseeably killing some civilians as an unintended side-effect. As long as the benefit is great enough, or the harm small enough, then it is ethically preferable to do the tactical bombing rather than to do nothing. In both cases, the reason why it can be ethically preferable to cause harm rather than do nothing is because one intentionally brings about a significantly greater good, merely causing the harm as an unintended side-effect of one's attempt to bring about that greater good.

¹⁰ First raised in (Williams 1973, 98–9).

¹¹ Raised in (Foot 1967, p.23), and discussed further in (Thomson 1985).

¹² Considered in, for example (Anscombe 1961; McMahan 1994).

As an example of how philanthropy through a morally controversial career can be analogous to these cases, we may consider a philanthropist who makes her money through financial trading, including speculation that affects the price volatility of wheat, thereby having a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the global poor. As with petrochemical engineering, financial speculation is a paradigm unethical career, because of the harm it typically causes.

However, let's suppose, as is natural, that the person pursuing philanthropy is altruistically minded, so she doesn't intend the harm to the global poor. Rather, the intention of the philanthropist is just to make money, so that she can help the poor with her donations. If she could make as much money through pursuing a career that didn't involve harming others, then she would do that instead. So the harm caused is a foreseen but unintended side-effect of her actions.

Moreover, we must bear in mind that the harm she causes would have happened anyway. Financial careers are extremely competitive, so, if she hadn't been speculating, someone else would have been, in her place. Inevitably, she would be changing who gets harmed by the speculation—she would trade on different companies and commodities than her replacement would have done—and so the situation is not analogous to *Jim and the Indians*. But it's still true that the ethical reasons she has to pursue the career depend in part on whether she would do more harm in that career than her replacement would have done.

If she is able to cause less harm than her replacement would have done—perhaps she is able to avoid making the most damaging trades—then the situation is analogous to the *Trolley* case. She is redirecting and mitigating a threat, and the harm she causes is merely an unintended side-effect of redirecting that threat. For this reason, it can be ethically preferable for her to pursue philanthropy through this career than through a morally innocuous career. Note, moreover, that this argument holds independently of the good that her donations do. So, even if she could earn no more through this career than through some other, morally innocuous career, she would still have an ethical reason in favour of choosing the morally controversial career.

If, in contrast, she were to do as much harm or even more harm than her replacement would have done, in her financial trading job, then the situation is a little different. It can still be ethically preferable for her to pursue such a career, but only if she earns significantly more through that career, and can therefore produce a greater benefit through her donations. If so, this makes her pursuit of philanthropy through financial trading to be more like the *Tactical Bombing* case: she creates a threat, causing a harm that wouldn't have happened anyway, but does so as a foreseen but unintended side-effect of pursuing a significantly greater good. It's generally thought that there is an asymmetry between bringing about harms and bringing about benefits, where it is more wrong to bring about a harm than it is right to bring about a benefit of the corresponding magnitude. For example, in the *Tactical Bombing* case, on non-consequentialist grounds it does not seem right to cause the (foreseen but unintended) deaths of 100 civilians in order to save the lives of 101 other civilians. So one might reasonably think that one should not enter that financial trading job if the harm is great and the benefit only slightly greater. But if the ratio of benefit to harm is great enough, then it can be ethically preferable for her to pursue that career.

4.3 A Real-Life Example

The conclusion of the above argument might seem counterintuitive, so it is worthwhile to consider a concrete, real-life case, about which we have well-developed intuitions. The example I suggest is Oskar Schindler, who was immortalized through the novel *Schindler's Ark* and the film *Schindler's List*. Schindler ran munitions factories for the Nazis, producing mess kits and later ammunitions for Nazi soldiers. He did this so that he could earn enough money to literally buy the lives of 1200 Jews. A key aspect of the story is that he deliberately ran his factories less efficiently than whoever would have been in his place. Though

accounts of Schindler have questioned his character—he was an opportunist and a womanizer—his decision to run the Nazi factories in order to save his workers has been universally admired.¹³ In particular, we think that Schindler should have acted as he did even if he had had the option to escape, avoiding having to work for the Nazis, but saving a much smaller number of Jews. As well as the sheer size of the benefit he was able to give others, two salient reasons why we think it admirable that he acted as he did are that he did not intend any of the harm that he caused, and that he in fact managed to better the lives of many people by running his factories less efficiently than the person who would have been in his shoes.

As regards career choice, we often think that working for an immoral organization is thereby immoral. The example of Schindler shows this not to be the case. In general, any harm-based reason against pursuing philanthropy through a morally controversial career has to be able to explain why Schindler acted commendably. It seems to me that this would be extremely difficult to do.

5 Integrity-Based Reasons

The second class of reasons against pursuing certain career paths are agent-centered: they are generated by facts about the pursuer of the career, not about the people potentially affected by the pursuer of that career. In particular, I'm going to consider integrity-based reasons. Intuitively, we think that there can be ethical reasons against pursuing certain careers because of reasons of integrity. We think that it is admirable, for example, for a musician to pursue a career producing music that they think is of aesthetic worth, rather than to sell out and start writing Christmas pop jingles, and that one reason for this is because the musician is acting with integrity—acting in accord with her deepest moral commitments.

Similarly, Bernard Williams gives the example of *George and the Chemical Weapons Factory* (Williams 1973, 98–9), in which George is offered a job at a factory that produces chemical weapons. George is told that, if he doesn't take the job, someone else will take his place, doing the same job with far greater zeal, furthering the production of chemical weapons far more than George would have done. But George is morally opposed to the production of chemical weapons, and working in this factory would be antithetical to George's deep moral commitments. This fact, Williams argues, gives George a strong ethical reason not to take the chemical weapons factory job.

Let's grant that Williams is right in George's case. We might naturally think that the same consideration applies in the cases we have been discussing. If one is concerned about climate change, as a deep project of one's, isn't it a bizarre violation of one's moral integrity to then work for a petrochemical company, so that one can fund climate change mitigation projects?

However, many cases of philanthropy through a morally controversial career are not like the *George* case. I'll give two conditions in which this is so. But before I do so, we need to clarify exactly what the integrity consideration amounts to.

First, the integrity consideration in this context isn't concerned with *demandingness*. It might well be that considerations of integrity mean that some career paths aren't obligatory.

¹³ A casual survey of the many tribute websites reveals rhapsodic praise for Schindler. See, for example, (Bülow 2011), who claims: "Oscar Schindler rose to the highest level of humanity, walked through the bloody mud of the Holocaust without soiling his soul, his compassion, his respect for human life". Even David M. Crowe's biography, which takes a particularly dispassionate and unromantic view of Schindler, describes him as "one of the most remarkable Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust" (Crowe 2007, p.624).

However, in order to be relevant to my argument, integrity has to affect the underlying ranking of which careers are altruistically better than which others.

Second, we are considering integrity violation as an intrinsic reason against pursuing a certain career. We are not considering instrumental reasons generated by integrity violations, for example that working in an integrity-violating career will likely make one less successful in that career, or make one more likely to burn out. These issues are discussed on their own in section 6.

With these clarifications on board, let's consider the two conditions in which integrity-based reasons do not apply.

5.1 Lacking the Relevant Commitments

The first condition in which reasons of integrity do not hold is when the prospective worker doesn't have moral commitments that are antithetical to the career in question. This might be the case in two ways.

First, the prospective worker might have deep moral commitments, but have no commitments specifically against the most lucrative careers available to them. In the case of extremely morally controversial careers, it's reasonable to suppose that almost any morally sensitive agent would find working in those careers to be a violation of their integrity. But the same is not true of most of the careers in the feasible set for prospective workers: careers in the petrochemical industry, or in finance. Many prospective workers just don't have deep moral commitments that are opposed to such careers.

This consideration is particularly strong because, even within the set of morally controversial careers, there are typically several options to choose from. Even if the climate change campaigner's integrity would be violated by working in a petrochemical factory, perhaps it wouldn't if she were to work in finance or management consultancy.

The second consideration is that the prospective worker might not have formed deep moral commitments at all. The question of career choice is most salient for young people—those who haven't left school or university. In many cases, such people have not formed deep moral commitments—indeed, in many cases the question of which career to pursue is itself tightly connected to the question of *which commitments to have*. For these people, their situation is rather unlike George's: rather than working out which careers best fit with a set of predefined projects, they are trying to work out what moral commitments they should have—and even what sort of person they should become—on the basis of the best arguments available to them at the time.

5.2 Mistaken Commitments

The second class of cases is where the moral commitments in question are based on a mistake. For example, in order to truly understand the case of the climate change campaigner, we need to know *why* she has a commitment opposed to working in a petrochemical company. Let's suppose that her reason is that she has a deep moral commitment to caring about other people and the environment. For this reason she wishes to mitigate climate change, and so opposes the work of petrochemical companies. This might mean that she has built up a disposition to feel animosity towards the idea of working for a petrochemical company. But that animosity is contingent—based on the fact that, in most cases, people who work for petrochemical companies thereby harm the environment. If this is the structure of her moral commitments, then, if she transfers this animosity to the idea of working in a petrochemical company as a philanthropist, she has made a mistake. She just hasn't realized

that such a career could be a very good way to fulfill her deeper commitment to mitigating climate change.

But if the commitment is based on a mistake, then there cannot be integrity-based reasons in favour of acting in accord with that commitment. What integrity requires in this case is that she revises her commitment, not that continues to act in accordance with that mistaken commitment.

In general, we want to be careful that we don't conflate two very different sorts of careers: first, going to work for a certain company on the basis of selfish reasons; and, second, going to work for a certain company in order to be a philanthropist. The surface similarity of the latter to the former means that we might be disposed to think that, if the former would violate our moral integrity, then so must the latter. But the underlying moral structure of the two careers are very different, and this should be relevant when we think about how such a career fits with our deep moral commitments.

5.3 A Real-Life Example

Again, because the *Strong Claim* can seem counterintuitive in its relation to integrity, it is worth considering a real-life example, that of Friedrich Engels. It's certainly true that Engels's deepest commitments were to communism, and to anti-capitalism. So the idea that Engels should have become a philanthropist at a capitalist firm, in order to fund the pro-communist movement, might seem absurd. But that's exactly what he did, working at his uncle's capitalist company, a job which he hated, in order to fund Marx's research and printing costs.

In doing this, rather than displaying a gross violation of integrity, it seems that Engels acted with the highest integrity. He found his moral projects sufficiently compelling that he was willing to work out how best to further them and to act on that basis. Indeed, the fact that he had the strength of will to work for a firm he found morally repellant demonstrates the strength of his conviction to communist ideals: it seems to me that, in doing this, he acted with greater integrity than if he had decided that, because of his moral beliefs, he could not bring himself to work for such a firm.

As with the case of Schindler, we should enshrine the case of Engels as a condition of adequacy on responses to the *Strong Claim*: any integrity-based response to the *Strong Claim* must also be able to explain why Engels' actions displayed commendable integrity. It seems to me that cleaving this distinction will be very difficult to do.

6 Three Objections

The three objections I'll consider I'll call objections from *burnout*, *failure* and *corruption*. These objections both question the feasibility of someone successfully pursuing a lucrative career and donating a large proportion of one's earnings.

First, one might not be able to pursue such a career because one would burn out. In such a career, the effort of working in a job one hates, in order to make as much money as possible, would mean that one gets so miserable that one is forced to leave one's career. I would expect this effect to be particularly strong for those for whom the job would feel like a violation of their integrity. For example, an animal rights activist might simply find it morally repulsive to work at an abattoir and, for that reason, if they tried to work there, they would fail and be forced to quit—even if they thought, for whatever reason, that working at the abattoir was the best thing for them to do. This might be a common reason

against altruistically motivated people to pursue philanthropy through what I call morally controversial careers.

Second, one might simply fail to get a lucrative career even if one intended to get one. Lucrative careers are generally very competitive, so the base rate likelihood of success is small. Moreover, it could be that precisely one's altruistic attributes make it harder for one to get and be successful in a lucrative career. Within the most lucrative sectors, perhaps employers are looking for ruthlessness and a cutthroat business attitude, which it is simply not psychologically possible to hold whilst also having altruistic aims. So perhaps altruistically minded young people generally could not get such a job, even if they tried.

Third, one might become corrupted by one's colleagues. If one works in a lucrative profession, it's likely that one will have to socialise and engage with many wealthy people, who often will have a very different moral worldview than one's own. One thereby risks losing one's youthful ideals and instead developing more selfish moral views. This might mean that one remains in one's lucrative profession, but keeps one's earnings for oneself rather than donating them.

These are important points. They should be taken into account by a young person deciding which career to pursue, at the very least because they alter the expected donation potential of different career paths. There are, however, ways to mitigate the risks of burnout, failure and corruption. In order to mitigate the risk of burnout, one could join a community of like-minded people; or one could arrange one's holidays such that one visits the projects that one's charitable donations have funded. Even if failure writes off careers in finance or corporate law, it's difficult to see how it would write off careers in private medicine or pilotry, so the budding philanthropist could apply for those careers instead. And in order to mitigate the risk of corruption, one could widely publicly declare one's intentions, such that it would be deeply embarrassing for one if one were to then alter one's views. At the extreme, one could set up a deed, legally binding oneself to give.

Moreover, these points do not challenge the core of my argument, for two reasons. First, if burnout, failure and corruption were the reasons why charity work is ethically preferable to philanthropy, then that would mean that charity work is preferable simply because of the weakness of the will of some young people. But that is not the common-sense view. As a comparison, the fact that some people would burn out, or fail, or become disillusioned, by working in the charity sector, does not mean that charity work is unethical.

Second, the risks of burnout, failure and corruption do not count against the idea that one should apply for lucrative careers and, if successful, try working in a lucrative career and being a philanthropist for a year or two, in order to gain information about how great the risks are. The cost to one's charity career would not be great, as it would be relatively easy to switch from a lucrative career to a career in the charity sector, but the informational gains would be very high. Again, however, the idea that most people should try out philanthropy through a lucrative career is not the common-sense view.

7 Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have argued in favour of two claims. The first claim was the *Weak Claim*, that, typically, it is ethically preferable to pursue philanthropy through a higher earning but morally innocuous career than to pursue a career in the charity sector. I gave four arguments in favour of this claim: the financial discrepancy, fungibility, uncertainty and replaceability arguments.

Second, I argued in favour of the *Strong Claim*, that, often, it is ethically preferable to pursue philanthropy through a higher paid and morally controversial career than to pursue

philanthropy through a lower paid morally innocuous career. I argued in favour of the *Strong Claim* by giving some common conditions in which the harm-based or integrity-based reasons against pursuing a career that is typically morally controversial do not apply.

Before I conclude, I should caveat that my conclusions are not universal truths. It's not true that, if everyone were convinced by my argument, everyone should go into philanthropy: there would still need to be charity workers (and farmers and train drivers, for that matter). My conclusion is contingent on the fact that we live in a morally highly counterintuitive world: a world of incomprehensible inequality, where 57 % of income (Milanovic 2009) and 85 % of wealth (Davies et al. 2009) are possessed by the richest 10 % of the global population—a fraction in which almost every reader of this article (students included) will find themselves.¹⁴ It is only because of the fact that those who possess the wealth and power in the world retain it, rather than redistribute it to the poor, that my argument works. Note, moreover, that this is precisely the situation that I am arguing we should try to change. Thus the world at which my conclusion aims is a world in which my conclusion does not hold.

As a final note, it's worth reflecting on the sheer scale of the problem we have identified. When one thinks of major problems in the world, one thinks of HIV/AIDS, or gender inequality, or war: visible, salient causes of suffering. What one certainly doesn't think of is the aggregate of hundreds of millions of hours misspent as a result of misguided individual career choices; the tremendous opportunity cost of thousands of brilliant young people going into 'ethical' careers, every year, squandering the opportunity they had to do huge amounts of good in the world, each allowing thousands to die. We don't normally see this as a moral catastrophe. But we should.

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¹⁴ If one earns above \$12 000/year, one is in the highest-income 10 %, globally. Note that all these figures given are purchasing power parity adjusted: they have taken into account the fact that money goes further in poor countries. If you live below the famous \$1.25/day poverty line, you consume less produce per day than could be bought with \$1.25 in the USA in 2005. 1.4 billion people live below this line. See (The World Bank Group 2008).

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