

Meena Krishnamurthy*

Nudging Global Poverty Alleviation?

DOI 10.1515/lehr-2015-0008

Published online November 13, 2015

Abstract: There is a growing body of work illustrating that we can motivate individuals to donate more to charities by nudging them through various behavioral techniques. Yet, there is very little discussion of whether we should motivate individuals by using these types of techniques. In this paper, I explore this under-examined matter. I begin by surveying the various ways in which individuals can be nudged to donate to charity. I then consider whether we should nudge people in these ways. I explore this matter by considering whether nudging interferes with an individual's autonomy and, if it does, whether this is morally impermissible. I argue that, in some cases, nudging will interfere with an individual's autonomy. I spell out which cases these are. I then argue that whether interfering with an individual's autonomy through nudging, as a means of alleviating poverty (and, in turn, promoting human rights), is impermissible will depend on whether we have perfect or imperfect duties to aid the poor. I close by suggesting that, at least for the time being, the moral permissibility of nudging poverty alleviation is indeterminate.

Keywords: nudging, non-rational motivation, autonomy, alleviating poverty, human rights

Introduction

In her seminal work on global justice, Martha Nussbaum discusses the case of Vasanti. Vasanti is

a small woman in her early 30s who lives in Ahmedabad, a large city in the state of Gujarat, in northwestern India. Vasanti's husband was a gambler and an alcoholic. He used the household money to get drunk. When that money was gone, he got a vasectomy to take advantage of the cash incentive that Gujarat's government offered to encourage sterilization. So Vasanti had no children, a huge liability given that a childless woman is more vulnerable to domestic violence. Eventually, as her husband became more abusive, she left him... Many women in Vasanti's position end up on the street, with no alternative but sex work.¹

¹ Martha Nussbaum, *What Makes Life Good*, THE NATION, May 2, 2011, available at <http://www.thenation.com/article/159928/what-makes-life-good#>.

*Corresponding author: Meena Krishnamurthy, University of Michigan, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, E-mail: mkmurthy@umich.edu

In short, women like Vasanti are very poor and, as a result, very often lack what they need to satisfy their basic human rights.² One effective and relatively easy way for us to help individuals such as Vasanti is simply to give more money to charities that are aimed at helping such women. Nussbaum, for example, champions the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which helped Vasanti to get a bank loan and to start her own business. While there are a myriad of charities that are effective in helping individuals attain the goods that they need to realize their human rights and that we can donate to, it is very often the case that we are simply too distracted, too tired, or too lazy to do so. It is clear, however, that if Vasanti ought to have what she needs to satisfy her human rights, then we must overcome such tendencies. We must be motivated to donate to charities that aim to help Vasanti secure the goods that she needs to realize her human rights.

There is a growing body of work illustrating that we *can* motivate individuals to donate more to charities by nudging them through behavioral techniques. Yet, there is little to no discussion of whether we *should* motivate individuals by using these techniques. This is a matter that is worth discussing. Nudging in the context of poverty alleviation brings to light the important question of whether we should nudge individuals to behave in ways that promote the *good of others*.³ Because it involves promoting the good of others, the matter of nudging in the case of poverty alleviation intersects with questions about the nature of our duties to aid others. It raises the important question of whether it is permissible to interfere in one person's autonomy in order to meet our duty to help others.⁴ In this paper, I explore these under examined matters. I begin by surveying the various ways in which individuals can be nudged to donate to charity. I then consider whether we should nudge people in these ways. I explore this matter by considering whether nudging interferes in an individual's autonomy and, if it does, whether this is morally

2 There are different accounts of what human rights consist in. On one view, there are but two basic human rights: physical security and subsistence. See HENRY SHUE, *BASIC RIGHTS: SUBSISTENCE, AFFLUENCE, AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY* (1980). On another view, there are many human rights and they are best understood as capabilities. See MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM, *CREATING CAPABILITIES: THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH* (2011).

3 The current discussion of nudging focuses on paternalism, on whether we should motivate individuals to behave in ways that promote their *own good*. The interest in paternalism stems from a concern with autonomy and when and whether interference in autonomy is morally permissible. Given the interest in autonomy, those who are interested in current discussions of nudging for paternalistic reasons should also be interested in the discussion of nudging for the benefit of others.

4 This matter does not arise in the case of nudging for paternalistic considerations. It is for this reason that nudging in the case of motivating action to help others – as in the case of poverty alleviation – is worth considering in its own right: it raises important concerns relating to autonomy and our duties toward others.

impermissible. I argue that, in some cases, nudging will interfere in an individual's autonomy. I spell out which cases these are. I then argue that whether interfering in an individual's autonomy through nudging, as a mean of alleviating poverty (and, in turn, promoting human rights), is impermissible will depend on whether we have perfect or imperfect duties to aid the poor. I close by suggesting that, at least for the time being, the moral permissibility of nudging poverty alleviation is indeterminate.

How We *Can* Motivate Individuals

There is growing body of research showing that there are a variety of ways to motivate individuals to donate and to donate more to charities such as SEWA. Many of these means fall under the category of “nudging.”⁵ This to say, they involve *non-rational means* of motivating individuals to make the choice to donate or to donate more to charity (than they otherwise would).

One familiar method of non-rational motivation, or nudging, relies on the *framing effect*. The term framing effect refers to a cognitive bias whereby individuals react differently to a particular choice depending on the language that is used to frame or to present it to them. The framing effect has long been viewed as compelling evidence of irrationality in human decision making. This is because the framing effect works through our fast-thinking processes (system 1). Unlike those involving slow thinking processes (system 2), which are slow, conscious, effortful, logical, and calculating, fast thinking processes are fast, automatic, and unconscious. They involve reflexive emotions rather than reflective reasons. If we think, as many philosophers do, that conscious logical thinking is essential to rationality, then the behaviors that results from system 1 are not rational.

The following are a few examples of how *framing effects* can motivate charitable donation.

Identifiable victim. Deborah Small, George Loewenstein, and Paul Slovic have shown that we are more motivated to help an identifiable victim than we are to help a large number of victims.⁶ When individuals are asked to focus on a single

⁵ The concept of “nudge” was first introduced in RICHARD H. THALER & CASS SUNSTEIN, *NUDGE: IMPROVING DECISIONS ABOUT HEALTH, WEALTH AND HAPPINESS* (2008). It has been suggested that “nudge” ought to refer specifically to *non-rational* means of persuasion. See Daniel Hausman & Brynn Welch, *Debate: To Nudge or Not to Nudge*, 18 J. POL. PHILOS. 123 (2010). I follow them in this usage of the term “nudge.”

⁶ Deborah A. Small, George Loewenstein & Paul Slovic, *Sympathy and Callousness: The Impact of Deliberative Thought on Donations to Identifiable and Statistical Victims*, 102 ORG. BEHAV. HUM. DEC. 143 (2007).

identifiable victim, such as Vasanti, and the impact of poverty on her life rather than on the “millions” that suffer from poverty, individuals tend to donate in greater amounts. Small, Lowenstein, and Slovic argue that, unlike in the case of the “many,” in the case of the identifiable victim, individuals are able to make an emotional connection with the person that is affected by poverty and are thereby more motivated to help her.

Prevention of death. Eileen Chou and Keith Murnighan have shown that whether the language of “preventing a death” or “saving a life” is used can also impact how motivated individuals are to help the poor.⁷ Their work illustrates that describing charitable donation as an opportunity to help someone to avoid a loss rather than describing it as an opportunity to help someone to achieve a gain leads to increased charitable donation. Chou and Murnighan argue that the prospect of loss generates a greater sense of empathy for the individual that is being helped, and, as a result, leads individuals to make greater charitable donations.

Other non-rational means can also be used to motivate individuals to make charitable donations such as those using a priming effect. *Priming* is an effect in which exposure to an initial stimulus influences a response to a later stimulus. Like the framing effect, the effect of priming works through system 1 (fast thinking) processes and can be understood as a non-rational means of motivating behavior. The following are a few examples of how priming can motivate charitable donation.

Memories. Francesca Gino and Sreedhari Desai have shown that, when individuals are primed by recalling childhood memories before they are asked to donate to a charity, they are more likely to donate a greater amount than when they are not primed in such a way.⁸ They argue that priming individuals with childhood memories causes feelings of moral purity, which provides greater motivation to engage in, what is perceived by the individual, as good behavior.

Moral realism. Liane Young and A.J. Durwin have shown that priming subjects to consider moral realism (the belief that “some things are just morally right and wrong”) increases individuals’ decisions to make

⁷ Eileen Chou & Keith Murnighan, *Life or Death Decisions: Framing the Call for Help*, 8 PLOS ONE (2013), available at <http://www.plosone.org/article/fetchObject.action?uri=info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0057351&representation=PDF>.

⁸ Francesca Gino & Sreedhari Desai, *Memory Lane and Morality: How Childhood Memories Promote Prosocial Behavior*, 102 J. EXP. SOC. PSYCHOL. 743 (2012).

charitable donations.^{9,10} They suggest two different explanations of this result. First, individuals may find it psychologically more costly to break moral rules that are perceived to be real, since they may see themselves as more open to punishment from others. Individuals may be motivated because of egoistic concerns such as avoiding shame or experiencing joy, and perceiving themselves as good moral agents (who make the right moral decisions and act in accordance with these decisions).¹¹ Second, individuals may be more motivated to donate because they feel more connected to other individuals. Moral realism suggests that there are moral principles that apply to all individuals. As such, moral realism could motivate people to engage in morally good behavior toward unrelated others out of feelings of connection or concern.¹²

Time first. Wendy Liu and Jennifer Aacker have shown that individuals are more likely to donate greater amounts of money to a charity when they are asked to give their time before they are asked to give money.¹³ Liu and Aacker argue that when individuals are asked to give their time, they automatically think in terms of emotional meaning: will volunteering for this charity make me happy? Being asked about giving their time, gives rise to positive feelings and a belief that volunteering will be linked with their personal happiness. This emotional mindset then leads individuals, when asked, to give greater amounts of monetary donations.

How We *Should* Motivate Individuals

Scenario

A campaigner for a charity, C, comes to S's door and shows S a "persuasive pamphlet"¹⁴ that is designed to nudge S to donate to the charity that C is campaigning for. After giving S some time to peruse the pamphlet, C asks S to donate to the charity. S donates.

⁹ Liane Young & A.J. Durwin, *Moral Realism as Moral Motivation: The Impact of Meta-Ethics on Everyday Decision-Making*, 49 J. EXP. SOC. PSYCHOL. 302 (2013).

¹⁰ Subjects were primed with the question, "Do you agree that some things are just morally right or wrong, good or bad, wherever you happen to be from in the world?" before they were asked to donate. See Young & Durwin, *id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Wendy Liu & Jennifer Aacker, *The Happiness of Giving: The Time-Ask Effect*, 35 J. CONS. RES. 543 (2008).

¹⁴ I use the pamphlet as an example of something that could be used to nudge S. Something else such as a video clip could be used instead.

Imagine that the “persuasive pamphlet” that C presents to S *combines* the various techniques described in the last section (in the most effective manner) to nudge S to donate to C’s charity.¹⁵ In presenting S with the “persuasive pamphlet,” is C interfering with S’s autonomy?

Whether C, the campaigner, interferes with S’s autonomy in presenting S with the pamphlet will depend on what we mean by “autonomy.” Richard H. Thaler and Cass Sunstein argue that nudges do not interfere with an individual’s autonomy. Indeed, this claim is central to their defense of nudging as something that both we and our government ought to pursue (in a variety of spheres such as health and social security).¹⁶

Thaler and Sunstein argue that nudges do not interfere in an individual’s autonomy because nudges do not constrain the options available to an individual. Thaler and Sunstein argue that, while nudges may steer individuals’ actions, they do not force individuals to act in particular ways. This is why nudges are argued not to interfere with autonomy.¹⁷

Return to our scenario. S has other options available to her despite C’s presentation of the persuasive pamphlet. She can choose to do something other than donate money to C’s charity. She could choose not to donate. She could also choose to crumple up the pamphlet and slam the door in C’s face. Framing the request in a certain way, for example, merely makes it less likely that S will pursue these other options. It does not eliminate them altogether. It is for this reason that Thaler and Sunstein would argue that S is not forced but is rather nudged toward donating to the charity by C’s presentation of the persuasive pamphlet. It is also for this reason that they would argue that S’s autonomy is not interfered with.

What Thaler and Sunstein miss in their discussion and evaluation of nudges is that forcing someone is not the only way to interfere in her autonomy. Even if S is not forced (where “forced” means that the individual in question has no other choice but to comply with the request), S’s autonomy might be interfered with in other ways. Indeed, when we are concerned with interferences in an

¹⁵ You might also imagine that other techniques that are not discussed in the last section are also added for great motivational efficacy such as cognitively depleting tasks, which may leave individuals more open to being influenced.

¹⁶ See THALER & SUNSTEIN, *supra* note 5.

¹⁷ Thaler and Sunstein (*see id.*) are primarily concerned with nudging people to do what is in their own best interest rather than what is in the interest of others. For example, Thaler and Sunstein discuss arranging food in ways that are most likely to lead people to eat healthy food in school cafeterias. They assume that eating healthy foods is in everyone’s best interest. They do, however, consider at least a few nudges that involve benefitting others such as those relating to anti-littering campaigns and organ donation.

individual's autonomy, we are not merely concerned with the question of whether she is making a choice in the face of alternative options or not, that is to say, that we are merely concerned with matters of coercion. We are also concerned with the question of whether the reasons for which the agent acts are her own reasons. We wish to determine whether she acts on or is moved by reasons that stem from or relate to her own aims or commitments and not those of another individual.¹⁸

In what follows, I put aside Thaler and Sunstein's notion of autonomy and coercion. Instead, I consider whether nudges – such as C's presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet – interfere with an individual's autonomy, understood, in a motivational sense. On the view that I consider here, an individual is *autonomous* if she (1) has aims or commitments and (2) acts in ways that are motivated by these aims or commitments.^{19,20} If an agent has an aim of helping the poor and acts, say, to donate to charity, *because* of her aim of helping the poor, then she is autonomous. She is autonomous, in the sense that I am concerned with here, since she acts as she does *because* of her aims. From Thaler and Sunstein's discussion it is unclear whether nudges are consistent with this sort of autonomy or not. I will explore this question by considering whether C interferes with S's autonomy by presenting her with the persuasive pamphlet.

18 Thaler and Sunstein side-step this issue by assuming that nudges move people to act in ways that are consistent with what are “judged by themselves” to be the right courses of action. There is, however, no good reason for thinking that this is the case in relation to many of the nudges that they discuss. For example, some people may very well judge that junk food is the right thing for them (because they believe that it eases their stress, for example). Furthermore, at least in the case of charitable donation, C would be wrong to assume that all individuals judge that they ought to donate to charity. Indeed, many people will judge that they ought not donate to charity (for whatever reason, some potentially justifiable and some not).

19 My account of autonomy is inspired by Harry Frankfurt's account to the extent that it is an internalist account of autonomy; it places emphasis on an individual's internal motivational structure rather than the external options available to her. For Frankfurt's initial view, see Harry Frankfurt, *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, in *THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT WE CARE ABOUT* 11–16 (1988), available at <http://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/philosophy/philosophy-general-interest/importance-what-we-care-about-philosophical-essays#contentsTabAnchor>. Motivational accounts are also given in Gary Watson, *Free Agency*, 75 *J. PHIL.* 205 (1975); Michael Bratman, *Practical Reasoning and Weakness of the Will*, 13 *NOÛS* 131 (1979); MICHAEL BRATMAN, *STRUCTURES OF AGENCY: ESSAYS* (2007). For the purposes of this paper, I do not take a stand on what exactly counts as being the right motivational structure for autonomous action (on whether, for example, as Frankfurt suggests, autonomy is acting on one's second order desires).

20 One might wonder what the connection between autonomy and freedom is. I follow the common view in thinking that to be autonomous is to be free (at least in the morally relevant sense). See T. M. Scanlon, *The Significance of Choice*, in *THE TANNER LECTURES ON HUMAN VALUES* 149 (Sterling M. McMurrin ed., 1988); JOSEPH RAZ, *THE MORALITY OF FREEDOM* (1988); JOHN RAWLS, *POLITICAL LIBERALISM* (1996).

Reconsider the original scenario. Whether S's choice to donate is, ultimately, an autonomous one will depend on which of the following possible situations obtain.

The Possibilities

Philanthropist. S aims to help the poor. S is motivated to help the poor. S would have given to the charity, even if C had not presented her with the “persuasive pamphlet.”

Weak willed philanthropist. S aims to help the poor. S is not motivated to help the poor. S would not have given to the charity, if C had not presented her with the “persuasive pamphlet.”

Misanthropist. S aims not to help the poor. S is not motivated to help the poor. S would not have given to the charity, if C had not presented her with the “persuasive pamphlet.”²¹

Neutralist. S neither aims to help the poor nor aims not to help the poor. S is neither motivated to help the poor nor not to help the poor. S would not have given to the charity, if the campaigner had not asked her to do so.²²

21 Whether such a situation is possible will typically depend on the strength of the individual's commitment. If the misanthropist's commitment to not giving is weak, then it is more likely that she will be motivated by the persuasive pamphlet to give to the charity. If, however, she is resolute in her commitment it is unlikely that she will be nudged. However, even in such cases, it may be possible (particularly if nudging techniques are combined appropriately) to motivate the misanthropist to give to the charity. In some cases, emotions can lead individuals to make impulsive decisions to donate. It can lead them to make decisions to do what they would normally avoid. See Michaela Huber, Leaf Van Boven & Peter McGraw, *Donate Different: External and Internal Influences on Emotion-Based Donation Decisions*, in *THE SCIENCE OF GIVING: EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF CHARITY* 175 (Daniel M. Oppenheimer & Christopher Y. Olivola eds., 2011). Such situations may be rare. Even so, it is important to consider such scenarios because of their implications for autonomy.

22 In this paper, I am focusing on the question of whether nudging interferes with autonomy and, if it does, whether it is morally permissible to nudge. There may be reasons, outside of those relating to autonomy, for thinking that nudging is morally objectionable. On this matter, see Hausman & Welch, *supra* note 5. Hausman and Welch argue that nudging is morally objectionable because of what C intends to do in nudging someone like S. They argue that this is wrong because C intends to substitute her judgment for S's. This may be true of some instances. C may intend to replace S's judgments about helping the poor with her own. Yet, I would argue, this is not the whole picture. In many other cases, C may have no intention regarding S's judgment at all. For example, C might be satisfied so long as S is motivated to give more to C's charity, even if C fails to change S's judgment about helping the poor and S continues to judge that she ought not help the poor. In such a case, C intends to go around

In the case of the *philanthropist*, S is originally motivated to help the poor and acts in a way that is moved by this aim. S donates to the charity *because* of her aim to help the poor. C's action of presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet, ultimately, has no impact on S's choice. So, in this case, the nudge does not have an impact on S's autonomy. S makes an autonomous choice to donate to C's charity.

In the case of the *weak willed philanthropist*, S was not originally motivated to help the poor but is now, after being presented with the persuasive pamphlet, motivated to do so and acts to do so. Whether S's action is autonomous, in the sense that I have in mind, will depend on how much of a motivating force C plays in S's action.

There is some vagueness in the original description of the weak willed philanthropist. It is unclear whether S genuinely has no motivation at all or not. It may be that S is already somewhat but not fully motivated to help the poor and that C's action of showing S the persuasive pamphlet only added to S's own motivation and worked with it to eventuate in S's action of donating to the charity. Put more metaphorically, it may be that S is almost up the hill and that C's action pushes S over the top, working with S's own initial motivation to give S enough motivation to actually get over the hill. If this is the case, then S's action is autonomous because S is motivated to act by S's own aims. S merely receives some motivational help from C.

What if S has the aim of helping the poor, but has no motivation at all to help the poor (outside of that given to her by C), would S's choice to donate be autonomous? I would question whether S really has an aim to help the poor, if S genuinely has no motivation of her own to act to help the poor. In part, I think, to have an aim to X is not only to have an intention to do X but is also to have, at least, some motivation to do X. The most likely scenario is that, if S is really not motivated at all to help the poor, then S does not have an aim of helping the poor. If this is right, then the case of the weak willed philanthropist reduces either to that of the misanthropist (she either has an aim not to help the poor) or the neutralist (or she has no aim either way).

If, however, such cases are possible – that is, cases where S aims to X, but has no motivation of her own to do X – then S is not acting autonomously when

S's judgment-making capacities entirely. She does not seek to substitute her judgment for S's. Rather, C seeks to substitute the motivation that she judges appropriate for S with C's own motivation. In this way, C is not treating S as a competent and rational deliberator. In attempting to motivate S in such a way, C suggests that S isn't sensitive to reasons and couldn't be moved through reason to do what C views as being the correct view. I would argue that this is disrespectful. It suggests that S is somehow incompetent and/or lacking the ability to be a rational deliberator. If we have a moral obligation to interact with individuals in ways that express respect for them, then this sort of nudging may violate this obligation.

she donates to C's charity. S is acting heteronomously because S's motivation to act comes not from her own aims but from someone else's, namely, C's. However, if S has the aim of helping the poor, then C would only be motivating S to do what S aims to do but is not motivated to do on her own. In this case, the nudge from C ultimately enables S to act on her own aims by helping her to overcome her weakness of will. In acting to satisfy her aims, S acts in a way that is very close to acting autonomously, even if not exactly autonomously.

In the case of the *misanthropist*, S is motivated, by C's action, to do what she aims not to do. In doing so, S is not acting in a way that is motivated by her aims. S is motivated by what C does to her. Her motivation to act derives from C's aims. Furthermore, S is motivated by C's action to act in ways that are contrary to her own aims. For these reasons, S acts heteronomously.

In the case of the *neutralist*, S is genuinely neutral toward helping the poor. She neither aims to help the poor nor aims not to help the poor. However, S is motivated by C's action of presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet. In this case, S's action is heteronomous, since S acts because of C's aims.

In summary, C's action of presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet leads C to act heteronomously in three cases: (in one description of) the weak willed philanthropist; the misanthropist; and the neutralist. It is often argued that individual autonomy ought not be interfered with. Individuals have an entitlement to make choices about how they carry out their lives. If this is right, then, given that in three cases S acts heteronomously, it is imperative that we consider whether C's action of presenting S with a persuasive pamphlet constitutes a genuine interference in S's autonomy²³ and, in turn, whether presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet is morally permissible in these cases.²⁴

23 In analyzing these possibilities, we must determine not only whether S is acting autonomously but also whether S's autonomy is being interfered with. As we see, in the case of the neutralist, the mere fact that S is acting heteronomously does not necessarily illustrate that S's autonomy is being interfered with.

24 My arguments take seriously the question of whether S's autonomy is interfered with by C when C presents the persuasive pamphlet to S. I do not, however, consider the fact that if C refrains from presenting the persuasive pamphlet to S, then C is no longer able to act autonomously. After all, C has the end of motivating others to act in certain ways, namely, to give to charity. If she fails to act on this end, then she is not acting autonomously. However, this is not of moral concern. Individuals do not have, as part of their entitlement to autonomy, an entitlement to interfere with other people's autonomy. So, while C might have the aim to motivate another person to act in a particular way, she is not, *prima facie*, entitled to do so. In fact, it would seem that, *prima facie*, she ought not act on this end in the case of the misanthropist, because of the interference that it would require in S's autonomy. Though, as I argue later, other considerations might override this presumption against nudging S in such cases.

First, in the case of the weak willed philanthropist (where S aims to help the poor but has no motivation of her own to do so), it is clear that even though C's action motivates S to do what she wasn't herself motivated to do, C is not interfering with S's autonomy in a morally impermissible way. Again, C's actions simply work to motivate S to do what she aims to but is not herself motivated to do. So, while S is not moved by the reasons that she has (namely, her aim of helping the poor), she is acting in accordance with these reasons. Strictly speaking, S's action may not be autonomous in the sense that S is not acting on or directly moved by her own aims. Yet, C's action promotes in S something very close to autonomy, namely, acting in accord with one's aims. C's action of presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet is no more worrisome, from a moral perspective, than your partner's setting an alarm clock to wake you up at the time that you wish to but are not motivated to wake up at. So, in this case, even if C's actions are understood as interfering with S's autonomy, they are not doing so in a way that is morally objectionable.

The other two instances – the misanthropist and the neutralist – are potentially more of a concern for those who value autonomy. In both cases, S is motivated by C to do something that S does not aim to do. In the case of the misanthropist, S actively aims not to help the poor and is motivated by C to do so. In the case of the neutralist, S has no aim either way, but is motivated to help the poor. In the case of the neutralist, S has no aim regarding the alleviation of poverty prior to meeting C. Unlike in the case of the weak willed philanthropist, in the case of the neutralist, S is not being moved to do something that she ultimately aims to do but is not motivated to do. So, C's action is not autonomy promoting in the way it is in the case of the weak willed philanthropist. Yet, C's action also does not interfere in S's autonomy in the way that it does in the case of the misanthropist. Unlike the misanthropist who aims not to help the poor, S does not aim not to help the poor. She has no aim either way. For this reason, C's actions cannot be understood as interfering in S's autonomy.²⁵

In the case of the misanthropist, S does have aims of her own – namely, not donating to charity. In presenting the pamphlet to S, C motivates S to act on C's aims, aims that are not S's own, aims that are contrary to S's own aims. For these reasons, C's actions interfere in S's autonomy. To the extent that

²⁵ It is important to recall that the neutralist may be acting non-autonomously in the sense that she is not acting in ways that are motivated by her genuine ends. However, this does not necessarily mean that her autonomy is being interfered with. The case of the neutralist is much like that of a very young child who does not have any deep commitments. In influencing this child to form certain commitments or to act in particular ways, a parent does not violate or interfere with the child's autonomy. There are no preexisting commitments to interfere with and hence autonomy is not being interfered with.

individuals have a moral entitlement to autonomy, in interfering in S's autonomy, C does something wrong and that she (prima facie) ought not do to S.

Initially, C does something wrong to S in this case. However, in the final analysis, that is, once other factors are taken into consideration, C's action may not be wrong. On the traditional Kantian picture of morality that emphasizes individuals' entitlement to autonomy, interference in a person's autonomy is permitted if there is adequate justification. What constitutes adequate justification? On the traditional Kantian picture, that emphasizes "liberty" or autonomy, the fact that interfering in one person's autonomy might bring about the best overall consequences is not a sufficient ground for interfering in her autonomy. For example, the fact that interfering in S's autonomy by motivating her to donate to the campaign could save a number of impoverished individuals' lives is not sufficient to justify interfering in her autonomy, unless other factors entail that S has a duty to help those who are impoverished and S is failing to meet that duty.^{26,27} If S has a duty to aid the poor and is not meeting this duty, then this constitutes adequate grounds for C's interfering in S's autonomy. In this case, C is justified in interfering in S's autonomy, if it will move S to do her duty. Whether C's actions, in the case of the misanthropist are wrong, all things considered, will, in part, depend on whether and what sort of duty S has to aid the poor.

On the traditional Kantian view, there are two types of duties: perfect and imperfect. Perfect duties must be fulfilled without exception and at all times. They specify a particular action. Imperfect duties are supererogatory. Fulfilling them is good, but is not strictly required. These duties also allow significant latitude in deciding when and how to comply with them.

Following from these Kantian distinctions, one might give two types of arguments in favor of S's duties to aid the poor. First, one could argue that the duty to aid is a Kantian imperfect duty, where one has a choice about whether to act on it or not in any given instance. Richard Miller (2004) has recently argued in favor of such view.²⁸ Miller argues that we have a general and demanding duty to help

26 Perhaps this response is not compelling. Perhaps, on the correct moral theory, when the consequences are significant enough, autonomy should be overridden. Whether this is the right view is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I am simply interested in the question of whether, on the traditional view that I am considering, there are grounds for allowing such interferences in a person's autonomy.

27 Note that some have argued that consent may constitute adequate justification for interference in an individual's autonomy. This is to say, if S consents to interferences in her autonomy, then interference is morally permitted. This sort of justification does not seem relevant to the case that we are assessing. In the case of the misanthropist, we can assume that S does not consent to being nudged in the way she is nudged.

28 Richard W. Miller, *Beneficence, Duty and Distance*, 32 *PHILOS. PUBLIC AFF.* 357 (2004).

others in need.²⁹ We have this duty simply because there are people in need and because we are in a position to help them. Miller argues that the duty to help those who are in need holds unless acting on it would risk worsening one's life significantly. The duty to aid is an imperfect duty on Miller's view, for, while the duty to aid holds generally, it gives out in cases where the cost imposed on us is too great. It is up to us to determine whether helping would impose too much of a cost (or risk) on us in a given instance.

Second, one could argue that the duty to aid is a perfect duty, where one has no choice about whether or where to do it. Thomas Pogge (2008) argues that we have a perfect duty not to act in ways that foreseeably harm others.³⁰ He then argues that we, individuals in developed countries, are contributing to global poverty by participating in global institutional structures that foreseeably cause poverty. He concludes that we have a duty to stop (foreseeably) harming the poor by stopping our contribution to international institutional practices that contribute to global poverty. We can satisfy this obligation, for example, by donating to charities that are aimed at changing the international institutional order. In this way, we have a perfect duty to aid the poor.

This familiar discussion of perfect and imperfect duties to aid the poor has implications for our topic here. Whether C is acting in a morally permissible way in interfering with S's autonomy will depend on which of these arguments is correct.

There are at least some instances where interference in an individual's autonomy is morally permissible on the traditional Kantian view. As mentioned earlier, the thought is that, if individuals are entitled to their autonomy, then we are not morally permitted to interfere in a person's autonomy *unless there is a reasonable justification for doing so*. In the case where an individual fails to satisfy a perfect duty, there is sufficient justification for interference. Immanuel Kant argued, for example, that perfect duties are enforceable, even if doing so would interfere in an individual's autonomy. If Pogge is correct and the existence of poverty is the result of our failure to meet our perfect duty not to harm others, then it is permissible to interfere in our autonomy as a way of ensuring that we meet this duty. In contrast, if Miller is right and our duty to aid the poor is merely an imperfect one, then it is not permissible to interfere in our autonomy as a way of motivating us to meet our duties to the poor. In some cases, we can permissibly choose not to help another person and in such cases we ought not be interfered with.

In summary, ultimately, whether C's action of presenting S with the persuasive pamphlet is, all-things-considered, morally permissible will hinge on

²⁹ On his view, we ought to cultivate a disposition to help those in need.

³⁰ THOMAS POGGE, *WORLD POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS* (2008).

answers to some of most important questions in global ethics. It will depend on what sort of duty S has to aid the poor.

Indeterminacy

In this paper, I have illustrated that there are a number of ways of nudging individuals to donate and to donate more to charity. I have also showed that, in some cases, using these techniques will interfere in an individual's autonomy. I have then argued that, ultimately, whether such interferences in an individual's autonomy are morally permissible depends on the duties that she has to aid the poor.³¹

This discussion suggests that, in considering the moral permissibility of nudging poverty alleviation, there is a high degree of indeterminacy. First, we may not be able to determine the morality of C's actions (all-things-considered). My arguments suggest that until the debates in global ethics about the type of duties that we

31 One might argue that adopting a practice dependent approach to global justice will enable us to avoid the moral indeterminacy that I have described. The practice dependent approach to global justice asks us to determine whether there is a particular practice that generates duties to help the poor. This approach would allow the discussion to be significantly detailed, allowing us to reach moral conclusions that depend on the particular practices being considered. However, there is significant debate about whether practice dependent views generate duties of global justice. See JOHN RAWLS, *THE LAW OF PEOPLES* (1998); Charles Beitz, *Justice and International Relations*, 4 PHILOS. PUBLIC AFF. 360 (1975); Thomas Nagel, *The Problem of Global Justice*, 33 PHILOS. PUBLIC AFF. 113 (2005). John Rawls and Thomas Nagel, for example, can be understood as arguing that the practice dependent approach does not generate such duties while Charles Beitz argues that it does. Taking up a practice dependent view of global justice just moves the indeterminacy to another or different level. Furthermore, even if it is a compelling view, it is, at least for now, unlikely to eliminate moral indeterminacy. Because they asks us to take into consideration particular (real world) practices, empirical claims are at the heart of practice dependent approaches to global justice. As a result, there is still much that is not settled. Take, for example, Pogge's account of global justice. We can read him as giving a practice dependent view of global justice: we have duties to aid the poor because we engage in international practices that contribute to or cause poverty. If we could get at the facts of this matter, then it would resolve the indeterminacy because it would establish that we have a perfect duty to aid. However, establishing that we (the rich) are contributing to or causing global poverty through our international practices is a notoriously difficult fact to establish. In fact, there isn't a clear way of establishing such a broad and general claim. In response, one might suggest that we consider a narrower claim, such as, we are contributing to or causing global poverty through specific international practices regarding foreign aid or sovereign debt, but even these are facts that are difficult to establish empirically. There is great debate among development economists about whether foreign aid and sovereign debt cause or contribute to poverty. Again, it seems that moral indeterminacy exists.

have to aid the poor are resolved, we will not know whether C's interference in S's autonomy is all-things-considered morally permissible or not. Debates about our duties to aid the poor are long standing and are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. This leaves us unable to evaluate the morality C's actions.

Second, even if we do settle the debates about our duties to aid the poor, there is a further indeterminacy to be concerned about. In theory it is easy for us to imagine that the interaction between C and S might take any of the four possible forms described above. In practice, however, it is difficult to know which of the four possibilities described actually obtains. It is difficult to know whether S is a philanthropist, weak willed philanthropist, misanthropist, or a neutralist. In turn, it will be difficult to determine whether, in presenting the persuasive pamphlet to S, C is acting permissibly or not. In turn, it is difficult to draw any general conclusions about how we should assess C's behavior toward S or about how C should generally act as she attempts to raise money for her preferred charity.

To be on the safe side, one might argue that it is best to avoid non-rational persuasion altogether and to engage in rational persuasion, where there is no risk of interfering in individuals' autonomy.³² The drawback of this approach is that rational persuasion is more difficult to engage in. It takes more time and thought. Furthermore, it may have less of a positive effect. People who are nudged may do more to alleviate poverty than those who are rationally persuaded.³³ If poverty is a pressing problem that deserves immediate attention and alleviation, then rational persuasion may prove less than ideal.

We are left then with a conundrum. We can engage in rational persuasion and leave people's autonomy intact, but potentially be less effective in our attempt to alleviate poverty. Or we can engage in nudging tactics and risk interfering in people's autonomy, but potentially be more effective in our attempt to alleviate poverty. However, whether this is a risk that we ought to take is something that can only be resolved by solving the broader debates in global ethics about the nature of our duties to aid the poor.

Notes: For comments that greatly improved my initial drafts, my sincere thanks go to the Editors of LEHR and an anonymous External Reviewer and to audiences at the workshops

³² One possibility may be to use philosophical or moral arguments as a rational means of motivating individuals to donate to charity. It has been shown, for example, that individuals are more motivated to donate to charity after they are exposed to positive and negative duty based arguments in favour of alleviating poverty. See Luke Buckland, Meena Krishnamurthy, Matthew Lindauer, David Rodriguez-Arias & Carissa Velize, Testing the Motivational Force of Negative and Positive Duty Based Arguments in Alleviating Global Poverty (unpublished manuscript).

³³ Small et al., *supra* note 6.

on “Human Rights and the Human Mind” at the College of Law and Business in Ramat Gan, Israel and “Effective Altruism” at the University of Virginia. I would also like to give special thanks to Judy Lichtenberg and Deborah Small for particularly helpful comments, which increased my understanding of the issues at play. Thanks also to my research assistant, Maggie Dalecki.