

## **Ethics academic pledges £1 million of career salary to charity**

A practical ethics researcher from Oxford University is bringing his subject to life by putting his money where his mouth is and pledging to give away an estimated £1 million over the course of his career.

Dr Toby Ord, a research associate at the Future of Humanity Institute, is launching a new society called Giving What We Can on Saturday and as its founder, has pledged more than half his salary to charity – amounting to more than £10,000 a year.

Members of the organisation will take a public pledge to donate at least ten percent of their salary to whichever organisations they believe can most effectively use it to fight poverty in the developing world. Dr Ord believes that he and his wife can give away around £2.5 million over the course of their careers – and that with the society, they can multiply this figure by at least 100. He already has renowned moral philosophers Peter Singer and Thomas Pogge on board, and is expecting to have more than 30 people signed up when the organisation officially launches.

At the launch, at Balliol College, Professor Alan Fenwick from Imperial College London will talk briefly about his work fighting neglected tropical diseases through his organisation: Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI). Dr Ord will give him a cheque for £10,000 representing the amount he put aside for charity while a student.

Melbourne-born Dr Ord explains: “As an undergraduate, I often argued with my friends about political and ethical matters. I regularly received the retort: ‘if you believe that, why don't you just give all of your money to people starving in Africa?’ This was meant to show that my position was absurd, but as time passed and I thought more about ethics, I found the conclusion increasingly sensible: why not indeed?”

Instead of just giving his money away, Dr Ord began investigating how he could use it to achieve the largest possible impact. He found that there was a wealth of information about the effectiveness of different programs for improving health in developing countries, but that this information was not getting to the public. He says, “In the study of global health, experts measure impact in terms of the number of years of healthy life you can save: whether by extending someone’s life or improving their level of health. While it costs about £30,000 to save a year of healthy life in the UK, the most efficient programs in developing countries can achieve this for only £2.”

This inspired Dr Ord to think about how much his giving could achieve. He said: “I calculated that on an academic’s salary, I should be able to earn about £1.5 million over my career (in today’s terms). I realised that if I were to continue to live modestly like I have as a student, I should be able to give away about £1 million of this. My student years were not extravagant, but were immensely enjoyable, with the chief enjoyments such as reading beautiful books and spending time with my wife and friends costing almost nothing.”

Dr Ord calculated that if he lived this way and gave away £1 million over his life, he could produce very large health benefits such saving a total of 500,000 years of healthy life for some of the world’s poorest people through interventions focusing on tuberculosis or neglected tropical diseases.

He says: "Life on my current income is very good. If I spent the extra money on myself I could go on holiday more often, get an iPhone, eat out at expensive restaurants. It would be nice, but not all that much better. So I have a choice between greatly improving the lives of tens of thousands of people or adding a few extras to my life. Put like that, it is an easy choice."

Dr Ord has made a commitment to give away everything over £20,000 (adjusting with inflation) to a variety of effective charities. "What is amazing is that we can do at least this much good," he said. "I realised it would be great if there was an organisation out there that made this stuff clearer for people. Giving What We Can is that organisation. Its members are people who have come to recognise the facts about poverty in the developing world and have made a public pledge to donate at least 10% of their income towards preventing this suffering."

The society will share information about the most effective charities, tax effective ways to give and offer 'a friendly challenge' for others to join them. Members can choose to give their money to wherever they think it will be most effective in eliminating suffering in the developing world, whether it be through medical or education charities or numerous other areas.

Dr Ord says: "Once you get used to the idea, it is actually not much of a burden. I feel much more purposeful in life. What is difficult is agonising over whether you can justify each luxury. By making a pledge you don't have to do that anymore: you just live within your new means. By standing together as a group, we hope to make others see giving this much as a real option and to encourage charities to be more efficient in their programs so as to attract our giving."

The Giving What We Can website will also provide the public with a comprehensive set of resources on giving, with links to all the major reports on poverty, articles on giving, pages devoted to dispelling myths about foreign aid and interactive tools to show how much you can do with your own income. Finally, it will have a series of pages assessing the effectiveness of different aid programs.

"In some ways this may be the largest impact that we will have," says Dr Ord. "Everyone can use this information to give more effectively."

### **Notes to editors**

- *The Pledge to Give:* 'I recognise that I can use part of my income to do a significant amount of good in the developing world. Since I can live well enough on a smaller income, I pledge that from today until the day I retire, I shall give at least ten percent of what I earn to whichever organisations can most effectively use it to fight poverty in the developing world. I make this pledge freely, openly, and without regret.'
- To set up an interview with Toby Ord, please email: [press@givingwhatwecan.org](mailto:press@givingwhatwecan.org)
- For more information visit [www.givingwhatwecan.org](http://www.givingwhatwecan.org)