

Profile: Toby Ord

Toby is a research fellow in ethics at the University of Oxford. He was raised in Melbourne, Australia where he enrolled in a science degree at university. While intensely interested in science, he spent much of his free time talking and thinking about how the world could be better:

“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 most 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: if my money could help others much more than it helps me, then why not?”

After finishing his science degree he decided to do a second degree in arts, so that he could study ethics.

“Ethics is the study of what is of fundamental importance in the world, and how this relates to how we should live. At this stage I knew that I wanted to make a large positive difference in the world and it seemed that studying ethics would help.”

He continued his studies at Oxford, and while there he found out just how much he could contribute through simply donating his money:

“I discovered that by donating a portion of my future income to the most efficient charities, I could save around tens of thousands of years of healthy life. Since I already had most of the things I value in life on my student stipend, I realised that my money would do vastly more good for others than it could for me and decided to make a commitment to donating to the most effective charities I could find. Many people contacted me asking how they could do this as well, which is how I came to set up Giving What We Can.”

Toby is currently donating his money to a range of organisations tackling global development and poverty. All are considered to be among the most effective in the world (including Giving What We Can's recommended charities). He is very glad that he decided to think seriously about giving:

“I thought that I would make a relatively small sacrifice to help so many people, but it has turned out to be no real sacrifice at all: the sense of engagement in the project of making the world a better place is worth far more to me than some new gadgets or a slightly larger house.”

Further information and interview opportunities

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Toby lives in Oxford with his wife Bernadette Young and their daughter Rose.