Does maximizing good make people look bad? Study 1b (#2730)

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1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
Participants perceive more negatively the moral character of a person who has a cost-effective approach towards donations, compared to someone who has a less cost-effective approach. Participants rate the person who has a cost-effective approach lower in empathy and integrity, but higher in reasonableness and competence, and judge them as less guided by moral motives and more guided by pragmatic motives. They also perceive the person who has a cost-effective approach as less guided by an authentic prosocial motivation and less trustworthy, and they are less preferred as a social partner.

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
To measure moral character (key dependent variable) participants will rate people on a 12-item scale of moral character that includes positive (moral, altruistic, sincere, pure, good, and nice) and negative items (immoral, selfish, insincere, impure, bad, and mean). Negative items will be reverse-coded. Participants will also rate the following traits of the person: empathy (caring, warm, and empathic), integrity (principled, honorable, and virtuous), reasonableness (reasonable, effective, realistic, and rational) and competence (competent, skilled, and proficient). To measure moral motives participants will evaluate whether the person’s approach is based on “genuine moral concern”, “moral principle”, “a genuine moral stand”, “personal self-interest”, “what was good for him personally” and “selfish reasons”. The last three items will be reverse-coded. To measure pragmatic motives participants will rate whether the donor’s approach was based on “what was reasonable”, “what was rational” and “a pragmatic stand”. To measure authentic prosocial motivation participants will evaluate whether the person “sincerely cares about the recipient(s) of the donation”, “wants to donate to the benefit of the recipient(s) of the donation” and will answer “How authentic do you find John’s approach?” and “How suspicious are you of John’s intentions?”. To measure partner preference participants will rate the extent to which somebody like the person would be a good person to have as a co-worker, neighbor, roommate, close friend, and romantic partner. To measure trustworthiness, we will ask participants “How trustworthy is John?”. We include two exploratory items of perceived empathy (“John feels for the recipient(s) of the donation”) and concern (“John wants to help the recipient(s) of the donation”). We include a three-item manipulation check to verify that people in the cost-effective condition are perceived to have more potential impact with their donation (“how much impact would his donation have”, “how much good would his donation do”, and “how cost-effective would his donation be”), compared to people in the less cost-effective condition. All of these questions will be asked using a seven-point scale. We will calculate a composite score for each variable that has more than one item by averaging the corresponding group of items.

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Two conditions: (approach: cost-effective vs. less cost-effective) between-subjects design.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
We will conduct a one-sided unequal variances t-test to examine whether participants perceive more negatively the moral character of a person who has a cost-effective approach towards donations. We will repeat a similar analysis with the different traits (empathy, integrity, reasonableness, and competence), motives (moral and pragmatic), and authentic prosocial motivation, partner preference, trustworthiness, and perceived impact (manipulation check) as the dependent variables. The directions of the predictions are specified above.

We will estimate effect sizes with independent-groups Cohen’s d and calculate 95% confidence intervals around the effect sizes and the mean differences.

We will also calculate Cronbach’s alpha for each scale. We will not perform analyses with scales that have an alpha below 0.7.

6) Any secondary analyses?
We will also check whether subjects understand the concept of cost-effectiveness using a multiple choice question and an open-ended question. We will ask an independent evaluator who is unaware of the hypothesis to rate whether responses to the open-ended question reflect an understanding of cost-effectiveness. We will examine if the main and secondary results are maintained after controlling for socio-demographic variables using multiple regression.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
We calculated the effect size from a paper examining a similar effect: moral character evaluations depending on consequentialist vs. nonconsequentialist...
decisions (Uhlmann et al. 2013). We used the study with the lowest effect size (study 1): Hedge’s g = 0.53. We calculated Hedge’s g because it is unbiased. We then did an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 to determine the sample size required to achieve a 95% statistical power, given a 5% alpha level and an effect size d of 0.53. The results showed that we need a total sample size of 156 people (78 per group). As a conservative measure we will collect a total sample size of 200 people (100 per group) using MTurk.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., data exclusions, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
We include two cost-effectiveness comprehension check questions (multiple choice and open-ended), socio-demographic variables (age, gender, race, born in the USA, education, income, political ideology, religiosity, and self-rank of social position) and three exit questions.

Participants who respond to less than 75% of the survey or who respond with the same option to every question will be excluded. We do not include attention checks to avoid prompting systematic thinking (Hauser & Schwarz, 2015).