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Ideas

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ELAINA NATARIO/GLOBE STAFF PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

FREE MONEY

HERE'S AN IDEA FOR FOREIGN AID: JUST HAND OVER THE CASH

BY DRAKE BENNETT

THERE ARE ALL sorts of things very poor people living in poor countries don't have. They lack secondary-school educations, usually, and good medical care. They lack steady work and life insurance, bank accounts and competent legal representation, adequate fertilizer for their crops, adequate protein in their diets, reliable electricity, clean water, indoor plumbing, low-interest loans, incubators for their premature babies, vaccinations and good schools for their children.

But the central thing they lack is money. That is what makes them, by definition, poor: International aid organizations define the "very poor" as those who live on less than a dollar a day. Despite this, the global fight that governments and nongovernmental organizations have waged against poverty in the developing world has focused almost entirely on changing the conditions in which the poor live, through dams and bridges and other massive infrastructure projects to bring commerce and electricity to the countryside, or the construction and staffing of schools and clinics, or subsidizing fertilizer and medicine, or giving away mosquito nets or cheap portable waterfilters.

In the last decade, however, the governments of the nations where most of the world's poorest actually live have begun to turn to an idea that seems radical in its simplicity: Solve poverty and spur development by simply giving out money. In Brazil and Mexico, India, China, South Africa, and dozens of other nations, hundreds of millions of poor people are now receiving billions of dollars in cash grants. The programs vary widely, but typically the money—disbursed through banks, post offices, state lottery offices, and even, in rural Africa, ranging armored cars with ATMs on them—goes directly to the poor, rather than being spent on particular projects by government or international aid officials.

The regular infusions of cash augment the paltry budgets of poor households, alleviating the pinch of deprivation, but proponents also see them as a long-term path out of poverty, and even a catalyst for economic growth. Research has credited cash transfers with improving the health and education of poor children, and there is also evidence that cash transfers nurture microenterprises, improve crop yields, and allow the poor to begin to save and invest. On a broader scale, some development experts argue that giving the poor more money to spend expands **MONEY, Page C3**

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ALLI ARNOLD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

HARD TO FIND

Why it's increasingly difficult to make discoveries – and other insights from the science of science

BY SAMUEL ARBESMAN

IF YOU LOOK back on history, you get the sense that scientific discoveries used to be *easy*. Galileo rolled objects down slopes. Robert Hooke played with a spring to learn about elasticity; Isaac Newton poked around his own eye with a darning needle to understand color perception. It took creativity and knowledge to ask the right questions, but the experiments themselves could be almost trivial.

Today, if you want to make a discovery in physics, it helps to be part of a 10,000-member team that runs a multibillion dollar atom smasher. It takes ever more money, more effort, and more people to find out new things.

But until recently, no one actually tried to measure the increasing difficulty of discovery. It certainly seems to be getting harder, but how much harder? How fast does it change?

This type of research, studying the science of science, is in fact a field of science itself, and is known as scientometrics. Scientometrics may sound self-absorbed, a kind of inside baseball for scientists, but it matters: We spend billions of dollars annually on research, and count on science to do such things as cure cancer and master space travel, so it's good to know what really works.

From its early days of charting the number of yearly articles published in physics, scientometrics has broadened to yield **DISCOVERY, Page C2**

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Q&A

Beyond good and evil

What Hitler and Mother Teresa have in common

BY REBECCA TUHUS-DUBROW

WHAT DO GANDHI and Mother Teresa have in common with Hitler and Jeffrey Dahmer? Very little, you might reply. But our perceptions of them are in certain ways surprisingly similar, according to psychologist Kurt Gray.

Though we're accustomed to classifying people as good or evil, saints or sinners, Gray draws attention to a distinction he considers even more fundamental. As we navigate the world, he argues, we categorize the entities we encounter as either "moral agents"—those who act, who are deserving of praise or blame—or "moral patients"—those who are on the receiving end of good or bad deeds. So villains and heroes wind up on one side of this divide, with victims and beneficiaries—abused children, damsels in distress—on the other. **Q&A, Page C4**

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'WOULD' PILE

What's wrong with stacking conditionals? **C3**

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UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

Organic makes you fat, the 'Lie to Me' effect, how bad calls affect athletes, and more **C4**

By Kevin Lewis

BRAINIAC

'Howl' for the age of the Internet, today's technology yesterday, and more **C2**

For more, **www.boston.com/bostonglobe/brainiac.**

Q&A

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Both Hitler and Gandhi, for all their profound differences, are moral agents, whom we see as capable of deliberate morally freighted action, self-control, and planning. One used his moral power to inspire millions of his countrymen, of course, and the other to kill them. But their agency, Gray argues, is on some level first and foremost in our images of them.

In his lab research, Gray has identified several intriguing corollaries to this hypothesis. Unsurprisingly, we tend to see moral doers as powerful, given to intention and decisiveness. But we also see the recipients as more capable of emotions and experience. Infants are a quintessential example: They are unequipped to earn praise or blame, and highly susceptible to hunger and desire, pain and pleasure.

Moreover, we seem to subconsciously infer the inverse: Both good guys and bad guys tend to be viewed as relatively impervious. It's hard to picture Gandhi whimpering over a bruised knee. In one of Gray's studies, people like the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King Jr., and Osama bin Laden were rated low in sensitivity to pain. Victims and beneficiaries, meanwhile, are seen as powerless, and are not deemed accountable for their own behavior. A puppy rescued from abuse, for example, is likely to be excused for its misdeeds. These are all extreme cases: In reality, of course, most people fall somewhere in between, exhibiting a nuanced combination of these traits. But Gray argues that we have a tendency to engage in "moral typecasting"—putting people in one category or the other and making corresponding assumptions.

Another basic finding is that we tend to view morality as a dyad—if someone performs a good deed, there must be a beneficiary around somewhere, while if someone suffers, there must be a culprit to blame. This suggests, for example, that a neutral figure simply standing near a villain will come across as something of a victim, instantly winning sympathy. The responses of subjects in the lab have supported this notion.

In collaboration with Harvard University professor Daniel Wegner, Gray has published several papers in journals including the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology and Science. He recently completed his graduate work at Harvard, and will start as an assistant professor at the University of Maryland next month. He recently spoke with Ideas at his Harvard office about the advantages of playing the victim, why doing good (or bad) deeds makes us physically stronger, and why most of us would rather hurt Mother Teresa than a random bank teller.

IDEAS: So you think our distinction between moral agent and patient is even more basic than the distinction between good and bad?

GRAY: The findings that I have suggest that people can flip-flop between good and bad quite easily. So if you're a hero and you do something wrong, all of a sudden you're immediately a villain. But it's much harder to become a villain or a hero and then go to victim. So people have this kind of, I'm not going to say innate, but kind of deep-seated categorization of whether you're a doer or receiver of morality.

> No one feels happy about giving an elderly nun extra pain, but they still do it.
>
> —KURT GRAY

IDEAS: What's the most surprising thing you've found?

GRAY: We're happy to reward good people when we can, let's say, but if someone has to pay the price, if someone has to feel pain and be harmed, then, because they're seen as less sensitive to pain, we pick them above your average person. So the study asked people to imagine they had pain pills, and they could divide them between a variety of people. So villains always got the most pain and the least pleasure, when we did pleasure pills, and people like orphans got the most pleasure and the least pain. But the interesting comparison was that heroes, like the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa, got more pain and less pleasure than your kind of average person. So like a bank teller or a network administrator or someone like that. And the idea there is just because people think they can take it.

IDEAS: Do you think at the same time we might think, this person is good so doesn't really deserve this, but on the other hand, they can take it. Is that other impulse there too?

GRAY: Certainly. When we ask people to divide the pain pills, we give it to them on the clipboard, the survey, they kind of sit there, and they look at it, and they look around, and they laugh nervously, and then they circle Mother Teresa—"Well, I guess." So no one feels happy about giving an elderly nun extra pain, but they still do it.

IDEAS: So there are these obvious extreme examples, like Hitler and Mother Teresa and orphans, but don't we know rationally that most adults are both?

GRAY: You can know rationally that people are capable of both, but it's just that we have this tendency to put people in bins.

IDEAS: But even someone like a friend, or ourselves?

GRAY: I think even there it happens....If your friend is really sad, her boyfriend just broke up with her, and you're giving her advice, then all of a sudden, in that instance, she becomes typecast as a patient, and because you're close to her, you're the agent. You're like, "Oh, it's OK, and I'll take responsibility and we'll do this."

IDEAS: So, just being around someone who's sort of in victim mode can allow people to become naturally more like agents?

GRAY: Yeah, that's the idea...the idea is that you naturally take your cues from others and become the opposite.

DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

IDEAS: Since beginning this research, have you noticed examples in your own life, your own observations?

GRAY: If you cast yourself as a victim, you always escape blame, better than someone who emphasizes their past virtue. So if you say, "Oh, it's not my fault, I was abused as a child and this and that," then you get off more than if you say, "Look at all the good I've done for society. Now I've done this one wrong thing, but my whole life of good deeds should compensate for it." Well, it turns out it doesn't.

IDEAS: Because we see that person, when they emphasize their good deeds, as an agent, and therefore they should be held accountable.

GRAY: Exactly. One example in the media—I mean, they're all the time, but David Letterman, when he was busted for sleeping with that woman on his set, he came out immediately and he says, "Listen, I'm a victim, I've been blackmailed here." And it's all about how he's been blackmailed instead of how he's been philandering.

IDEAS: Can you discuss your study on "moral transformation"?

GRAY: If you think of yourself as a good-doer, you come to possess increased agency and decreased experience. Same with an evil-doer. So what we have people do is randomly assign them to either do something good for others or receive something themselves, and then measure their physical endurance by holding a weight. And what we find is that those who are given the opportunity to help others actually become physically stronger, possess more endurance....And what we find is that those who are given the chance to do evil increase in agency in kind, but also a little bit more than those who do good.

IDEAS: Why a little bit more, do you think?

GRAY: I think it's because for the average person with a conscience, it's a little harder to do evil....I really need to overcome my qualms to do it, and once I do it, I feel like I must be even more powerful.

IDEAS: So is the takeaway that in order to maximize our power we should all be doing really bad deeds?

GRAY: I think there are reasons other than increasing agency to do good....So I think they both work in the short term, but I think the good deeds are probably a little more sustainable, and also might make you feel better about yourself in the long run.

UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

SURPRISING INSIGHTS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES | BY KEVIN LEWIS

WESLEY BEDROSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The 'Lie to Me' effect

TOMORROW NIGHT, you can watch one of the final episodes of season two of "Lie to Me," a crime drama on Fox based on a real-life psychologist who reads body language to determine if someone is lying. But just as some have observed a "CSI effect" (which can lead people to develop unrealistic expectations of forensic science), there also appears to be a "Lie to Me effect." People were randomly assigned to watch an episode of "Lie to Me," an episode of another crime drama ("Numb3rs"), or no show at all. Then they watched a series of interviews, half of which were truthful. Those who watched the "Lie to Me" episode were more likely to think people were lying but were actually less accurate in figuring out who lied. Moreover, according to the authors, "when looking at the evidence generated across several hundred individual studies, the idea of 'Lie to Me' is highly implausible and almost certainly misleading."

Levine, T. et al., "The Impact of 'Lie to Me' on Viewers' Actual Ability to Detect Deception," Communication Research (forthcoming).

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When helping hurts

ONE OF THE big debates in foreign policy is whether foreign aid works. Political scientists at New York University looked down the street, at the United Nations, for clues. Because the United States has been known to try to influence Security Council members by promising aid, the rotating two-year terms of nonpermanent members provide a test of the effect of foreign aid. Compared to countries not on the Security Council, countries on the Security Council experienced lower economic growth, became less democratic, and were less friendly to the press for several years after being elected to their two-year term. This pattern was largely confined to nondemocratic regimes and casts doubt on the wisdom of providing generous aid to such regimes.

Bueno de Mesquita, B. & Smith, A., "The Pernicious Consequences of UN Security Council Membership," Journal of Conflict Resolution (forthcoming).

Know fair

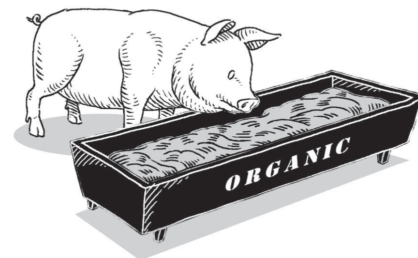
YOU DON'T HAVE to watch too many hours of sports to witness a "bad" call. And if the call goes against your team, it's infuriating. But what if the call goes against the other team? Would that bother you, too? A new study suggests that at least the players themselves are bothered. From analyzing videotapes of over a hundred NBA games, researchers found that players made just over 50 percent of their first free-throws after a dubious foul. Normally, players shoot over 70 percent on their first free-throw. However, free-throw percentages were back to normal on the second free-throw and closer to normal on the first free-throw when the player's team was behind, suggesting that fairness only goes so far.

Haynes, G. & Gilovich, T., "'The Ball Don't Lie': How Inequity Aversion Can Undermine Performance," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology (forthcoming).

How down payments affect marriage

WHO SAYS MONEY can't buy love? An economist at the University of Georgia has found evidence that helping people save also greases the wheels of the marriage and divorce market. In the late '90s, hundreds of low-income individuals in Tulsa, Okla., were randomly assigned to receive funds they could use to help make a down payment on a house. Initially unmarried individuals were over 40 percent more likely to be married after four years in the program. Meanwhile, initially married individuals were even more likely to be divorced after only 18 months in the program. Not surprisingly, divorces were especially likely among those with already poor spousal relations; couples with good relations were actually less likely to divorce.

Eriksen, M., "Homeownership Subsidies and the Marriage Decisions of Low-Income Households," Regional Science and Urban Economics (forthcoming).



Green and fat

NEXT TIME YOU reach for that "healthy" product at the grocery store, think carefully about the consequences. According to psychologists at the University of Michigan, an "organic" label acts as a kind of get-out-of-jail-free card for people concerned about their weight. If told that some Oreo cookies were "made with organic flour and sugar," people judged them to have fewer calories, even when labeled with the same number of calories. This bias was especially strong for environmentalists. People also judged exercise as less important for someone trying to lose weight if that person had just eaten an "organic" rather than a regular dessert.

Schuldt, J. & Schwarz, N., "The 'Organic' Path to Obesity? Organic Claims Influence Calorie Judgments and Exercise Recommendations," Judgment and Decision Making (June 2010).