Introduction

2014 has been a defining year for GBS Switzerland. We have launched several successful new projects: Raising for Effective Giving (REG) fundraised thousands of dollars for effective charities, Sentience Politics launched political initiatives for more vegetarian meal options in public canteens and initiated a public debate over sustainability and animal welfare, and Crucial Considerations (CC) researched ethical questions of crucial importance. In this report we would like to share more about our achievements in 2014.

Contents

- Introduction
- Launch
- Blog
- Events
- Media
- Support for effective charities
- Projects
  - Raising for Effective Giving
  - Sentience Politics
  - Effective Altruism Switzerland
  - Crucial Considerations
Launch

GBS Switzerland was launched at the University of Zurich in April. Our launch event included talks by Michael Schmidt-Salomon and Adriano Mannino. Michael Schmidt-Salomon is the president of Giordano-Bruno-Stiftung in Germany and presented his new book “Hoffnung Mensch”. Adriano Mannino outlined our projects and how they relate to our core goals.

Blog

In 2014, 86 articles were published on the GBS Switzerland blog – 18 in English, 68 in German. The articles cover the topics of rationality (mainly cognitive psychology and probability theory), ethics (effective altruism, world poverty, animal ethics, bioethics, machine ethics) and science (evidence-based medicine, evolution, artificial intelligence).
Events

GBS co-president Adriano Mannino talking about effective altruism at the University of Basel

GBS Switzerland organized and hosted various public outreach events throughout the year 2014. From total 42 events, 12 were in English and 30 in German, 25 featured invited speakers from Switzerland, Germany, England, Ireland, and the United States.

- Deep Learning by Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber (University of Basel)
- Evolutionärer Humanismus (University of Bern)
- Rationality: How to THINK (University of St. Gallen)
- Overcoming Biases: How to detect flawed thinking (University of Basel)
- Moral biases and our daily life and death decisions (University of Bern)
- Moral biases and our daily life and death decisions (University of Basel)
- Kruzifix, Staat, Kirche und Ethik (University of St. Gallen)
- Evolutionärer Humanismus (University of Basel)
- Sentience Politics press conference (Federal Palace Bern)
- Prof. Steven M. Wise – The Nonhuman Rights Project (University of Basel)
- Prof. Steven M. Wise – The Nonhuman Rights Project (University of Bern)
- GBS Switzerland Launch Event with Dr. Michael Schmidt-Salomon (University of Zurich)
- Charity evaluation: How to give rationally (University of Basel)
- Kruzifix im Schulzimmer? Atheist, Freidenker und effektiver Altruist (University of Bern)
- Prof. Peter Brugger – Neuropsychologie des magischen Denkens (University of Basel)
- Besser denken mit Gedankenexperimenten (University of St. Gallen)
- Prof. Beda Stadler – Die modernen Life Sciences im Clinch mit dem Zeitgeist (University of Basel)
- Filmabend (University of Bern)
- Expected Utility Theory – Entscheidungsfindung in einer unsicheren Welt (University of Basel)
- Irrationalität in der Politik (University of St. Gallen)
- Sentience Politics (University of Bern)
- Sammelstart der Sentience-Initiative für nachhaltige und faire Ernährung (Unternehmen Mitte, Basel)
- Entwicklungshilfe aus humanistischer Sicht. Von der Missionierung zum Effektiven Altruismus (Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich)
- Vision und Traum der Religion oder Trauma und Illusion des Glaubens
- Bitcoin (University of Basel)
- Denkfest 2014 – 4 Tage Wissenschaft, kritisches Denken & intelligente Unterhaltung, 11.-14. September (Volkshaus Zurich)
- Info Event: Effective Altruism (St. Gallen University)
- Info Event: Evolutionärer Humanismus, inkl. Apéro (University of Bern)
- Transhumanismus: Segen oder Fluch? – Dr. Bernd Vowinkel (University of Basel)
- Giving Game (St. Gallen University)
- Ethische Karrierewahl (University of Bern)
- The Abolition of Ageing? (University of Basel)
- Ethical Career Choice (University of Basel)
- Effective altruism for animals: How can we help the most animals with our limited resources? (University of Basel)
- Effektive NGOs: Helfen mit Herz und Verstand (University of Bern)
- Superintelligence (University of Basel)
- Introduction to Bitcoin (University of Basel)
- Evolution, Kooperation und Altruismus (University of Bern)
- Effektive NGOs: Die Zukunft der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit? (University of Basel)
- Dr. Melanie Joy: Why we love dogs, eat pigs, and wear cows (University of Basel)
- Podiumsdiskussion: Dürfen wir Tiere essen? (University of Bern)
- Adriano Mannino: Effektiver Altruismus: Wie wir mit kritisch-rationalem Denken hunderte Menschen und Tiere retten können! (University of Jena)

In addition, GBS Switzerland organized two community weekends with more than 40 participants and about 8 talks each. They took place in Switzerland from February 14-16 and September 5-7 and contributed to building a movement.
Media

GBS and especially its projects Raising for Effective Giving and Sentience Politics have received a lot of media attention in 2014. Some newspaper, radio and TV reports are listed here. With replies to some articles we try to contribute to a critical reporting. Most media appearances were in German.

- **NPR** (REG), December 12
- **SRF DOK** (Sentience), December 18
- **NZZ Folio** (GBS), December 1
- **All In** (REG), November 26
- **Tages-Anzeiger** (REG), November 15
- **Humanistischer Pressedienst** (GBS), September 8
- **Humanistischer Pressedienst** (GBS), September 5
- **Tele Basel** (Sentience), September 1
- **Bluff Magazine** (REG), September 3
- **Tages-Anzeiger Magazin** (Sentience), July 25
- **PokerOlymp** (REG), July 9
- **NZZ** (GBS), June 23
  - GBS (reply), June 25
- **Tele Basel** (Sentience), June 16
- **Star TV** (Sentience, from 14:25 on), May 26
  - Sentience (reply), May 27
- **SRF Forum** (Sentience), April 24
- **WOZ** (Sentience), April 10
  - Sentience (reply), July 27
- **Basler Zeitung** (GBS/Sentience), March 27
  - **GBS** (reply), March 31
  - **Beda Stadler** (reply to reply), April 5
  - **GBS** (reply II), April 13

Raising for Effective Giving featured on the cover of Bluff Europe, Europe’s biggest poker magazine
Support for effective charities

In 2014, GBS Switzerland supported effective international charities with a total sum of CHF 483’978. Among other live-quality improvements, these donations generated:

- **99,467** deworming treatments distributed by SCI & DtWI
- **13,735** insecticide-treated bednets distributed by AMF
- **626,342** animals spared from a life in industrial agriculture
- **$ 46,891** in direct cash transfers to households in extreme poverty
- **2 annual** salaries for GiveWell research on effective charities

These numbers are based on scientific estimates by the charity evaluators GiveWell and Animal Charity Evaluators. The interventions’ effectiveness is assessed in randomized controlled trials. The exact numbers on the donation volume are documented [here](#).
Projects

Raising for Effective Giving

*Raising for Effective Giving* (REG) unites top poker-pros who want to maximize their positive impact on the world. They pledge 2% of their winnings – roughly 5-10% of their net income – to *provenly effective* organisations. Scientific charity evaluators have shown that charities differ in their effectiveness by orders of magnitude, meaning that a given amount of money can save *multiple times more lives* when given to the right charities. As a *meta-charity*, REG promotes the idea of effective giving in the poker community and beyond.

REG was launched on July 3 in Las Vegas with a *talk on effective charity* by co-founder Adriano Mannino: Which rational arguments speak in favor of giving unusually high amounts to unusually cost-effective charities? The 100 members that joined REG since its launch donated *more than 400,000$* to effective charities. The largest contribution came from current poker world champion Martin Jacobson who won a *prize money of 10$ million* at the World Series of Poker Main Event in November 2014 and donated 5% of it. REG has been featured in *various news articles*, including an *interview on NPR*. Another highlight was the organization of the first charity poker tournament in the Aria resort in Las Vegas in December. The tournament was co-organized with GiveWell and the WPT foundation.
Sentience Politics

Press conference at the Federal Palace’s media centre in Bern

Sentience Politics researches and takes strategic action for the well-being of all sentient individuals. “Sentience” refers to the ability to have conscious experiences, in particular to the ability to feel pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering. As a matter of (neuro-)biological fact, this ability is not exclusive to humans but shared by non-human animals, too. It’s the fundamental reason why we benefit from having rights and are harmed in their absence.

Sentience Politics was first presented to the public on April 1 at the media center of the Swiss federal parliament building. Two months later we launched our first political project: the popular initiative “Fair and Sustainable Food” in the Canton of Basel-City. Our scientifically well-founded position paper “Sustainable Food 2020” is backing the initiative’s claims. It shows how the consumption of animal products affects climate change, resource efficiency, world poverty, public health and animal rights. By the end of the year we collected more than half of the signatures required to get a binding vote on the claims. Another year remains for collecting the second half which will be more than enough.

We could win over 20 political and societal figures who support our position paper’s main idea: less meat, more plant-based foods. Prominent supporters include Moritz Leuenberger (former member of the Swiss government), Jean Ziegler (member of the Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council) and several members of parliament. In December, Sentience Politics was featured in a documentary by Swiss national television, reaching more than half a million people.
The association Effective Altruism Switzerland (EACH) provides a network from and for people who intend to use their professional careers in order to make the largest positive difference to the world. The ethics of career choice is a young and comparably neglected academic domain: During our life, we work for 80,000 hours on average – which is why it pays to approach career-related decisions very systematically. EACH makes use of evidence-based approaches to figure out the most promising strategies. The concept “earning to give” is one such strategy: Instead of working for an effective NGO yourself, occupying a position that would have existed anyway, one can e.g. try to shoot for a high income elsewhere in order to then, through large donations, finances several NGO-positions that would not have existed otherwise. More than 40 people joined EACH in 2014. EACH members identify with the philosophy of effective altruism. They volunteer for our projects, donate a significant amount of their income to effective charities and base their career choice in part on how it allows them to have a bigger positive impact on the world.
Crucial Considerations

Image of a blog post investigating whether there are objective ethical facts.

**Crucial Considerations** (CC) are ideas that potentially imply radical changes to our world-view and priorities – radical changes to what we should think and do, as individuals and society. Put another way, they concern issues where mistakes are most dangerous (for the achievement of our goals), issues that we want to make especially sure we “get right”. Locating crucial considerations is a matter of big-picture thinking and asking the right questions, it requires interdisciplinary expertise and knowledge about formal and human (ir)rationality. CC is a blog project by GBS Switzerland and the Foundational Research Institute (FRI) and discusses potentially game-changing ideas in science and philosophy. We published 9 blog posts in 2014.