ANNALS OF INQUIRY

SAM BANKMAN-FRIED, EFFECTIVE ALTRUISM, AND THE QUESTION OF COMPLICITY

Leaders of the social movement had no way to know that FTX would collapse. But they also had every incentive to ignore warnings.

By Gideon Lewis-Kraus

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Some members of the effective-altruism community are concerned that a path may exist from their shared philosophical underpinnings to Sam Bankman-Fried's deceit. Photograph by Erika P. Rodriguez / NYT / Redux

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One of the inevitable questions to have attended the abrupt undoing of the erstwhile billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried—the overnight collapse of his cryptocurrency exchange, FTX, and its intertwined sister organization, the trading firm Alameda Research—concerns that of the part in the fiasco played by ideas. Neither Bernie Madoff, Kenneth Lay, nor Jeff Skilling was, to the best of my knowledge, associated with a particular philosophical tradition. Bankman-Fried has, however, identified himself as an adept of effective altruism, the utilitarian-flavored philanthropic social movement. Bankman-Fried first encountered effective altruism, or E.A., as an M.I.T. undergraduate, when he was introduced to the Oxford philosopher Will MacAskill. E.A. leaders recruited Bankman-Fried as someone likely to make a lot of money that he might then give away for the betterment of the world. In less than a decade, the investment seemed to have proved auspicious: Bankman-Fried became the movement's most prominent donor, promising to eventually donate almost all of his net worth, which was once estimated at twenty-six billion dollars. He has said, on multiple occasions, that his consideration for the lives of others aroused his appetite for financial risk: had he been working merely for his own pleasure, he might have comfortably retired a minor billionaire, but there is no diminishing marginal utility to each additional dollar earned to redeem the world.

He flipped the coin—or, rather, a lot of coins, many of which he had himself invented—until he lost. Unfortunately, it seems he was playing with someone else's money: FTX's customer deposits were commingled with Alameda's own funds, where they were apparently used to shore up bad trades and ill-advised investments. The whole operation lost something like eight billion to ten billion dollars, if not more. (Bankman-Fried has said that poor labelling of accounts was to blame. His spokesperson told me that the meltdown was the result of a "large market crash," and said, "Mr. Bankman-Fried never knowingly used FTX deposits

to shore up any trades or investments.") Critics of E.A. have delighted in Schadenfreude, as if the mask of optimized benevolence has slipped to reveal the naked will to power. When Bankman-Fried participated in a direct-message interview with Vox's Kelsey Piper, earlier this month, his casually dismissive comments about "ethics" were immediately taken as confirmation that E.A. was a sham—a convenient alibi for greed and the lust to dominate. For those of us who are secretly unsure whether we're decent people, this came as a reassuring development. The elementary tenet of effective altruism—that privileged Westerners could be doing considerably more good in the world than most of us do—could be discarded as self-serving cant. (The spokesperson said, "Mr. Bankman-Fried does in fact deeply believe in Effective Altruism, and always has, but he thinks that there are many things that companies do—specifically highly regulated ones—around the edges to attempt to appear as 'good actors.' ")

The Reluctant Prophet of Effective Altruism

Gideon Lewis-Kraus on the philosopher William MacAskill.

Within E.A. circles, the prevailing mood has been one of raw anguish. Within a day or two of the initial revelations, one longtime leader took to the E.A. Forum, the movement's internal bulletin board, to offer mental-health services: "If you're personally affected by what's happening, the community health team wants to be here for you. We've already heard from people who are feeling worried, angry, or sad." For the most part, the possibility of the movement's responsibility in the affair has been taken up with seriousness and subtlety. There is no evidence that anyone in E.A. was aware of the artifice that propped up Bankman-Fried's empire, but community members have been troubled by the idea that there may have been a path from their shared philosophical underpinnings to Bankman-Fried's deceit. Some have argued that what Bankman-Fried seemed, in his enigmatic way, to be saying to Vox was not that his vow to uphold E.A.'s ideals was merely a cover

story but something like the opposite: he was, in fact, so committed to the greatest good for the greatest number that he was unwilling to observe the kinds of everyday ethical niceties that hedge naïve utilitarian calculations. MacAskill noted that nowhere in the E.A. canon are the means advertised to justify the ends. Moral integrity was a good in and of itself.

This is true enough as far as it goes, but, as MacAskill himself is painfully aware, this has always represented an unstable equilibrium. On the one hand, what makes the movement distinct is its demand for absolute moral rigor, a willingness, as they like to put it, to "bite the philosophical bullet" and accept that their logic might precipitate extremes of thought and even behavior—to the idea, to take one example, that any dollar one spends on oneself beyond basic survival is a dollar taken away from a child who does not have enough to eat. On the other hand, effective altruists, or E.A.s, have recognized from the beginning that there are often both pragmatic and ethical reasons to defer to moral common sense. This enduring conflict—between trying to be the *best* possible person and trying to act like a *normal* good person—has put them in a strange position. If they lean too hard in the direction of doing the optimal good, their movement would be excessively demanding, and thus not only very small but potentially ruthless; if they lean too hard in the direction of just trying to be good people, their movement would not be anything special. Put crudely, it can seem as if either their ideas conduce to a means-end rationality—someone like Bankman-Fried might very well have felt justified in bilking unsophisticated investors out of money that could be put to better use funding, say, pandemic preparedness—or their ideas conduce to nothing in particular at all.

There are a few different ways to look at this underlying tension. The most cynical is to accuse them of the "motte-and-bailey fallacy"—that they shuttle at their convenience between a strong but controversial claim (that all actions ought to be evaluated by their consequences alone) and a weaker but palatable one (that of

course other considerations, such as personal virtue, matter). A more charitable interpretation is to suggest, to invert Flaubert, that they are violent and original in their seminar-room work such that they might be marginally better than regular and bourgeois in their lives. To point this out is not to condemn them on the grounds of cowardice. What has made E.A. special has less to do with the community's scholarly contributions than with the unusual subculture they have cultivated. E.A.s have been expected to live relatively simply, to confront the reality of suffering, and to do something to remediate it. And many truly did, and do. Some observers have argued that this scandal will be good for E.A., because their compromised institutions might die off such that their ideals will flourish elsewhere. But this perspective, to me, misses the point. The broader culture is marked by neither a widespread sensitivity to misery nor a pervasive sense of obligation to do something practical about it, and for all of its faults the culture of E.A. was. One didn't have to agree with everything they did to believe that they created a worthwhile role for themselves and acquitted themselves honorably.

MacAskill, whom I profiled this year, understood, perhaps better than anyone, that the endurance of the movement rested on a fragile foundation of social norms—not what they argued but how they lived. In the course of the time I spent with him this past spring, he returned again and again to his worry that something crucial had perhaps been lost as their initial code of frugality gave way to material abundance; they were no longer a group of kids in a basement eating Sainsbury's baguettes for lunch but a set of real institutions with real money, proximity to power, and catered vegan buffets. Caroline Ellison, the former C.E.O. of Alameda Research, who also once dated Bankman-Fried, argued on the E.A. Forum, last spring, that frugality was a vestigial concern; there were, she claimed, less costly ways to indicate one's alignment with the underlying cause. In his own lengthy post on the subject, MacAskill argued that such signals had to be at least minimally costly if they were to feel substantive. MacAskill's centrality to the community has had somewhat less to do with his intellectual contributions than it has with how appealingly and charismatically he has been able to model righteous

conduct. When young E.A.s needed guidance—about whether it was defensible, say, to pay for private lodgings for a conference—they looked to MacAskill's personal example for instruction.

In retrospect, the most important issue facing the community may not have been the erosion of norms around frugality but of those around honesty. The story commonly told about Bankman-Fried was that he drove a beat-up Toyota Corolla, slept on a beanbag, and had nine roommates. MacAskill repeated this fable to me, characterizing it as evidence of Bankman-Fried's profound commitment to the cause. What he did not mention, and what came out only in the last few weeks, is that Bankman-Fried and his roommates were living in a forty-million-dollar penthouse in a gated community in the Bahamas—part of a total local property portfolio worth an estimated three hundred million dollars. His parents, professors at Stanford Law, owned a vacation condominium worth millions of dollars. (Bankman-Fried has said the properties were necessary to insure that his "top Silicon Valley employees" had "an easy way to find a comfortable life" on the island. His spokesperson told me, "Mr. Bankman and Ms. Fried have offered to give up any ownership interest they may have in the home.") All of these were indeed costly signals, though what they signalled couldn't easily be reconciled with the E.A. covenant. (When asked about the discrepancies in Bankman-Fried's narrative, MacAskill responded, "The impression I gave of Sam in interviews was my honest impression: that he did drive a Corolla, he did have nine roommates, and—given his wealth—he did not live particularly extravagantly.")

Still, E.A. leadership ratified a mythology about Bankman-Fried that was simply not the case. One senior member of the community told me that the peculiar contradictions of Bankman-Fried's life style were widely known but somehow unexamined: it was true that he drove a beat-up Corolla, but it was also true, if underemphasized, that he enjoyed a sumptuary existence—not only the lavish

penthouse but the use of such appurtenances as a private jet. “The problem was that there was a story about his frugality that was something adjacent to a lie—or at the very least left listeners with a very wrong impression, which is roughly as harmful as lying,” he said. “I guess it started as a story about something else—perhaps his bad car and long working hours. But in time there were these two versions of S.B.F. that didn’t quite add up, and you only heard one of them. I knew, for example, that he slept on my friend’s couch, and wasn’t somebody who put on airs, but I also have the memory of knowing S.B.F. actually did have nice stuff—and it was only that first part that I repeated, because it was just a thing you said. I don’t blame people for getting this wrong, but as a community we communicated badly, and at a large enough scale that we supported the false S.B.F. narrative. We let people believe he was a saint, when in reality he lived like a pretty standard workaholic billionaire.”

The senior community member continued, “He was frugal at times and spendthrift at times, seemingly in service to his work. I don’t sense there is an easy single narrative here.” It’s easy to imagine how senior E.A.s, many of whom made repeated visits to the Bahamas, might have justified his expenditures: the properties may have been portrayed as sound real-estate investments, and Bankman-Fried needed fitting places to host such figures as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, who came to speak at a conference he co-hosted with Anthony Scaramucci this past spring. In a widely amplified story, Fox Business reported that Bankman-Fried owned a yacht; the claim was attributed to a local yachtsman, who said he frequently spotted Bankman-Fried at the marina, and Bankman-Fried’s spokesman categorically denied that his client had himself ever “owned” a boat. The outlet also drew on accounts from local restaurant workers to allege that he spent thousands of dollars a day on fancy catered lunches for his company; the spokesperson pointed out that this does not seem particularly outlandish for a firm that employed more than a hundred people. But if the extent of Bankman-Fried’s profligacy has been exaggerated, it may be because his penthouse and the private jet provided an invitation. In Jewish law, there is a concept called “mar’it ayin”

designed to address this kind of ambiguity: you don't eat fake bacon, for example, because a passerby might see you and conclude you're eating real bacon. The reason for this law isn't primarily to protect the reputation of the fake-bacon-eater; it's to sustain the norms of the whole community. The passerby might decide that, if it was O.K. for you to eat bacon, it's O.K. for him to do it, too. When important norms—of frugality, and the honesty with which it was discussed—are seen as violated, the survival of the culture is imperilled.

Not everyone in the community believed that it was benign to indulge billionaire sponsors. Last year, Carla Zoe Cremer, a Ph.D. student at Oxford, expressed public unease about the potential for corruption—epistemic and otherwise—and proposed a set of reforms, including whistle-blower protection and the broad democratization of E.A.'s command structure, which seemed liable to engender unwarranted trust in authority figures. "My recommendations were not intended to catch a specific risk, precisely because specific risks are hard to predict," she told me recently. "But, yes, would we have been less likely to see this crash if we had incentivized whistle-blowers or diversified the portfolio to be less reliant on a few central donors? I believe so." Josh Morrison, the founder of an organization that promotes challenge trials for vaccines, warned earlier this year on the E.A. Forum about the increasing "Ponzi-ishness" of a movement overly devoted to its own proliferation, and the ensuing possibility that priorities would shift if the community came to overvalue perks and status: "I think virtue tends to be very situationally dependent and that very admirable people can do bad things and deceive if it's in their interest to do so." As he put it to me, "Due to a combination of immaturity, naïveté, self-interest, and irrational exuberance, the E.A. community disregarded the risks of tying itself to an aggressive businessman in a lawless industry."

There was not only a reason (money) to overlook Bankman-Fried's more dubious qualities but also a major precedent for doing so. In 2017, Bankman-Fried launched Alameda Research as an explicitly E.A.-minded proprietary trading firm. As one early Alameda employee told me, "Something really amazing happened. Because we were all E.A.s, and we all believed ourselves to be value-aligned—we were all on the same team, making money not for ourselves but to make the world better. . . . I've been in startups my whole career, and this was something I'd never seen before: everyone was genuinely just trying to do their part, and trying to do it as efficiently and effectively as they could, and just trusting that we were all on the same team. And the reason I was as upset with Sam as I was is because, in my view, he defected. Everyone played 'coöperate' for months and he defected and destroyed the commons."

Bankman-Fried operated with almost no traditional chaperons, such as an active accounting department. The early Alameda employee and a second colleague told me that Bankman-Fried maintained unreasonable expectations for productivity, and that two of the original team members needed medical attention for overwork. (Bankman-Fried's spokesperson said that one was working multiple jobs.) And he exhibited a staggering appetite for risk. As one forum contributor familiar with the situation put it, "The majority of staff at Alameda were unhappy with Sam's leadership of the company. Their concerns about Sam included concerns about him taking extreme and unnecessary risks and losing large amounts of money, poor safeguards around moving money around, poor capital controls, including a lack of distinction between money owned by investors and money owned by Alameda itself, and Sam generally being extremely difficult to work with." Subsequent comments took issue with some of the specific allegations, but the drift of the post was widely confirmed. As the early employee put it to me, the primary misgiving was Bankman-Fried's "demonstration of a pattern of behavior that illustrated a total lack of ethics."

The story Bankman-Fried has told about his decision to build FTX, his cryptocurrency exchange, is that the available options offered a subpar user

experience. According to the early employee, however, he told workers at Alameda that he also wanted to create FTX to list dicey cryptocurrency derivatives, including jerry-rigged novelties, inspired by leveraged E.T.F.s, for tokens like ether; these products would allow consumers to make very big bets without requiring a lot of capital up front. These derivatives might make short-term sense as part of a sophisticated institutional investor's trading strategy. But, the employee said, "On long timescales these things tend to perform horribly regardless of what the price of the underlying asset does. There are several different points where these things bleed money, and if you are the person running them, you can be on the other side of those trades and drain all this money out of the product." The employee continued, "He was so excited about these products that are just so predatory—they are blatantly short-term gambling, and in the long term the house wins. You can talk about 'means justify ends' stuff, and there are of course shades of gray in that, but this was pretty clearly just, 'We want to make this product so that we can essentially scam people out of their money and then give it to charity.' Commonsense morality has a very clear answer to this: you don't fucking do that." (Bankman-Fried's spokesperson declined to comment on this matter.)

By the late spring of 2018, most of the original recruits were gone. (Bankman-Fried recently told the *Wall Street Journal* that staffers left the firm because of personal disputes and their lack of productivity, and that Alameda subsequently addressed the accounting, risk, and other issues they raised.) The employee told me, "I had conversations with fellow-E.A.s at the time, saying, 'You shouldn't trust this guy or associate with him because he's just not an ethical person.' " A longtime E.A. wrote on the forum, "I think the vast majority of EAs had little they could have or should have done here. But I think that I, and a bunch of people in the EA leadership, had the ability to actually do something about this. I sent emails in which I warned people of SBF. . . . I had sat down my whole team, swore them to secrecy, and told them various pretty clearly illegal things that I

heard Sam had done [sadly all unconfirmed, asking for confidentiality and only in rumors] that convinced me that we should avoid doing business with him as much as possible."

Neither of the former Alameda employees believed that Bankman-Fried could be taken at his word. The early employee thought that E.A. leadership should have intervened at the time, and said, "Once Sam started becoming the face of E.A. in a bunch of ways, once the FTX Future Fund was being set up—that's when something *needed* to happen. But we'd blown past the Schelling fence"—the E.A. word for the Rubicon, more or less—"and then there wasn't another one. There were all these steps in the direction of presenting him as an E.A. and a good guy, and it became really hard to stop the momentum." The employee went on, "And after that initial 2018 explosion, when we all left, I would guess there were probably not many discussions about reputational risk from S.B.F."

There may not have been extended discussions, but there was at least one more recent warning. "E.A. leadership" is a nebulous term, but there is a small annual invitation-only gathering of senior figures, and they have conducted detailed conversations about potential public-relations liabilities in a private Slack group. In public, MacAskill was particularly preoccupied with the idea of a "PR disaster, esp among some of the leadership" that might undermine the movement, as "Elevatorgate," a sexual scandal, had for the New Atheists. In private, many decisions were subject to intense optics-related scrutiny. When MacAskill and I first discussed the possibility of a profile, last November, he wrote to inform the group, saying that this "gives an even greater reason not to do anything shady." In May, one of MacAskill's lieutenants wrote to ask about the movement's relationship with Peter Thiel: "Given his really bad reputation (supporting Trump, etc.) my current view is that it would be a good thing for the EA community to full-throatedly distance ourselves from him, but I wanted to make sure that there is no connection with him now." (One of the FTX Future Fund researchers piped up to make a countervailing point, referring, presumably, to donations that Thiel

made to the campaigns of J. D. Vance and Blake Masters: “Might be a useful ally at some point given he is trying to buy a couple Senate seats.”)

This past July, a contributor to the Slack channel wrote to express great apprehension about Sam Bankman-Fried. “Just FYSA,”—or for your situational awareness—“said to me yesterday in DC by somebody in gov’t: ‘Hey I was investigating someone for [x type of crime] and realized they’re on the board of CEA’ ”—MacAskill’s Centre for Effective Altruism—“ ‘or run EA or something? Crazy! I didn’t realize you could be an EA and also commit a lot of crime. Like shouldn’t those be incompatible?’ (about SBF). I don’t usually share this type of thing here, but seemed worth sharing the sentiment since I think it is not very uncommon and may be surprising to some people.” In a second message, the contributor continued, “I think in some circles SBF has a reputation as someone who regularly breaks laws to make money, which is something that many people see as directly antithetical to being altruistic or EA. (and I get why!!). That reputation poses PR concerns to EA whether or not he’s investigated, and whether or not he’s found guilty.” The contributor felt this was a serious enough issue to elaborate a third time: “I guess my point in sharing this is to raise awareness that a) in some circles SBF’s reputation is very bad b) in some circles SBF’s reputation is closely tied to EA, and c) there’s some chance SBF’s reputation gets much, much worse. But I don’t have any data on these (particularly c, I have no idea what types of scenarios are likely), though it seems like a major PR vulnerability. I imagine people working full-time on PR are aware of this and actively working to mitigate it, but it seemed worth passing on if not since many people may not be having these types of interactions.” (Bankman-Fried has not been charged with a crime. The Department of Justice declined to comment.)

I was unable to confirm the existence of a federal investigation as early as July, and, though there was no reason to discount the source’s credibility, it would have been nearly impossible for most of the channel’s participants to verify this rumor at the

time. It nevertheless seems like a tiding that might have given participants pause. But, according to someone on the Slack, there was "surprisingly little engagement. Mostly 'thanks for the flag.' " When I asked if it was possible that the leaders hadn't seen the warning, the Slack participant told me, "I honestly can't imagine it went unnoticed." The next day, a C.E.A. higher-up wrote to ask if it made sense to invite former President Barack Obama to appear at the group's annual conference series, and one Slack participant suggested a panel on A.I. risk with the philosopher Toby Ord and the longtime E.A. Jason Matheny, who served in the Biden Administration, and is now the president and C.E.O. of the RAND Corporation. MacAskill chimed in to propose that they involve Bankman-Fried. He wrote, "Idk, a discussion between Obama, Romney, Matheny, with SBF as moderator (unf too many men, but maybe Arati Prabhakar"—currently the director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy—"could be an option too)." (When asked about this, MacAskill wrote, "Let me be clear on this: if there was a fraud, I had no clue about it. With respect to specific Slack messages, I don't recall seeing the warnings you described.")

In a 2022 episode of the "80,000 Hours" podcast, the host Robert Wiblin introduced Bankman-Fried, as prelude to an obsequious three-hour-and-twenty-minute conversation, as a paragon of the movement. After news of FTX's collapse broke, Wiblin declared on Twitter that he was "fucking appalled" by Bankman-Fried's actions, and denied on the forum that he had any knowledge of Bankman-Fried's Bahamian high life. His protestations of innocence might very well be legitimate, but it also seems plausible that he would have been unwilling to engage with the possibility that someone with the right intellectual armature might nevertheless not be a good person. (Wiblin disputed this characterization, saying, "I am well aware that someone might have good ideas but be of bad character.") When my profile of MacAskill, which discussed internal movement discord about Bankman-Fried's rise to prominence, appeared in August, Wiblin vented his displeasure on the Slack channel. As he put it, the problem was with the format of

such a treatment. He wrote, "They don't focus on 'does this person have true and important ideas.' The writer has no particular expertise to judge such a thing and readers don't especially care either. Instead the focus is more often on personal quirkiness and charisma, relationships among people in the story, 'she said / he said' reporting of disagreements, making the reader feel wise and above the substantive issue, and finding ways the topic can be linked to existing political attitudes of New Yorker readers (so traditional liberal concerns). This is pretty bad because our great virtue is being right, not being likeable or uncontroversial or 'right-on' in terms of having fashionable political opinions."

In other words, it seems as though the only thing that truly counts for Wiblin is the inviolate sphere of ideas—not individual traits, not social relationships, not "she said" disagreements about whether it was wise to throw in one's lot with billionaire donors of murky motive, and certainly not "traditional liberal concerns." (Wiblin told me, "I wasn't talking about articles that focus on personal virtue, integrity, or character. I was talking about, for example, a focus on physical appearance, individual quirks, and charisma.") Effective altruism did not create Sam Bankman-Fried, but it is precisely this sort of attitude among E.A.'s leadership, a group of people that take great pride in their discriminatory acumen, that allowed them to downweight the available evidence of his ethical irregularities. This was a betrayal of the E.A. rank and file, which is, for the most part, made up of extremely decent human beings.

What's worse, however, is what was effectively communicated to Bankman-Fried himself. Ideas in the abstract are influential, but practical social norms constrain what individual actors think they can get away with. The message from E.A. leadership to Bankman-Fried seemed clear: as long as your stated ideals, not to mention your resources, are in alignment with ours, we might not bother ourselves with the other dimensions of your behavior. After all, "our great virtue is being right." (MacAskill insisted to me that the movement's leaders have always emphasized acting with integrity.) There was every incentive to look the other way. By the beginning of the summer, Bankman-Fried's FTX Future Fund, for

which MacAskill was serving as an adviser, had promised grants in excess of twenty-eight million dollars to E.A.'s institutional pillars, including C.E.A.; these outfits were the largest recipients of the new foundation's largesse. It's not that E.A. institutions were necessarily more irresponsible, or more neglectful, than others in their position would have been; the venture capitalists who worked with Bankman-Fried erred in the same direction. But that's the point: E.A. leaders behaved more or less normally. Unfortunately, their self-image was one of exceptionalism.

In a Zoom appearance at the *Times'* DealBook conference this week, Bankman-Fried affirmed the seriousness of his ethical commitments, offering that what he "was thinking a lot about," in addition to pandemic prevention, was "bed nets and malaria, about saving people from diseases. No one should die from that." This past summer, I spoke to Bankman-Fried for about an hour, and he told me in no uncertain terms that he viewed precisely these traditional E.A. causes as emotionally driven issues, and that antimalarial bed nets had never been a priority. His own preferences were governed by the hard mathematical logic of expected value, and he intended the preponderance of his own financial contributions to flow to such "longtermist" causes as A.I. risk. When I asked him about future funding for "neartermist" projects, such as the eradication of tropical diseases, he said, "Yeah, well, I think it should come from, like, people who think that that's what's important for them and, yeah, elsewhere—from the perspective, I guess of, like, not me or something." It remains unclear to me how these statements could be successfully reconciled. Nevertheless, at the end of our conversation, he went out of his way to highlight the importance of moral character.

"Is there anything that I haven't asked about that I should ask about?" I said. "Anything about Will that you would want to say?"

For the majority of our conversation, Bankman-Fried had seemed unapologetically distracted by more important things happening on other screens,

but he paused his other activities.

"I think he's—he's a great guy. I think that's, like, an important and relevant part of him that maybe doesn't always get talked about." He added, "Not, like, not from an E.A. perspective. . . . But I think that, you know, being a fun, funny, caring person is important to him—and it's important, I think it's often underrated."

"What do you mean?"

Bankman-Fried continued, "I think we often look, sort of, like, you know, at people who are doing something very different than—or people who have a public persona and, you know, end up viewing them from a bit of a perspective of, like, just looking at their work and not about how they do it. And I think that it does end up mattering a fair bit, you know—how they go about it."

In other words, Bankman-Fried was going out of his way to emphasize the purportedly neglected virtue of being a good person. In his assessment of MacAskill, at the very least, I tend to agree. When my profile appeared, MacAskill disputed my characterization of him as a "reluctant prophet." But now the ship of effective altruism is in difficult straits, and he, like Jonah, has been thrown overboard. While MacAskill lies in the belly of the big fish, the fate of effective altruism hangs in the balance. Jonah, accepting the burden of duty, eventually went to Nineveh and told the truth about transgression and punishment. At the end of that story, the sinners of that city donned sackcloth and ashes, and found themselves spared. ♦

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The host of "Financial Audit," a popular YouTube series, claims that his goal is to make his viewers more financially literate, with his down-and-out interviewees serving as extreme test cases for what not to do.

By Brady Brickner-Wood

THE LEDE

What China's Vibe-Coding Capital Can Tell Us About the A.I. Boom

Tech workers have flocked to Liangzhu, a small town outside Hangzhou, looking to escape China's corporate culture and build their future with A.I.

By Afra Wang

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"An Unprecedented Case of Child Abuse"

In an L.A. criminal court, new details emerge about the mysterious couple who collected more than twenty babies through surrogacy.

By Ava Kofman

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