Research Statement

My primary research interests are ethical in orientation. Since it seems to me that ethical reflection can best take place within the context of some conception of the nature of human action, thought, and feeling, my main concern so far has been with descriptive and normative issues in moral psychology. I am often influenced by ancient approaches to these issues, and so have related interests in ancient and Asian philosophy. I also have broad interests in the philosophy of religion, though I am especially interested in topics where there is some overlap with practical issues (e.g., practical arguments for religious belief, the problem of evil, metaethical views that connect morality to the divine, etc.).

Below I detail some of my current and planned future research in these areas.

Inner Virtue and Ethical Cultivation (continuing and future)

My first two publications discuss issues on the border of ethics and religion that have received fairly little direct investigation by philosophers. In "Spiritual, but not Religious?" (*International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*), I articulate a concept of spirituality as a commitment to inner ethical transformation, and in "Dispassion as an Ethical Ideal" (forthcoming in *Ergo*), I try to reconstruct in contemporary terms one such ideal of ethical cultivation, involving the removal of "passions", by looking at how it is treated in the ethical traditions of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Stoicism, and Buddhism.

I am interested in continuing this project and extending it to include other issues which have been important in several global ethical traditions but which have not played a major role or received much treatment in modern moral thinking. One such issue is meditation, which is a part of many different ethical traditions, and has been studied extensively in psychology recently, but which moral philosophers have not much discussed. Another, which unlike meditation now has a primarily negative connotation, is asceticism. What ethical role do these practices play, and do they have something valuable to contribute to contemporary moral thinking? More broadly, is there cause to think of the ethics of inner transformation shared by these traditions as a distinctive form of ethical theory?

Moral Psychology and the Foundations of Ethics (current and future)

"Desire, Goodness, and Reasons" (draft available) - There has been an increase in philosophical dissatisfaction with Humean accounts of desire, and a corresponding attraction to the ancient view, according to which all desire is in some sense "aimed at

the good". Nevertheless, it's not clear how best to understand the metaphor of "aiming at the good". I argue that most accounts tend to be either too intellectualized or fail to show exactly how desire counts as evaluative. I defend an account of desire as a type of *sui generis* responsiveness to reasons for action, and show how the account can make sense of both human and (non-rational) animal desire.

"Eudaimonism and Second-Personal Reasons" (in progress) – According to the eudaimonism in the background of most virtue-ethical theories, ethical claims are ultimately grounded in the way that they lead to the flourishing of the agent. In contrast to this, one of the distinctive features of much modern moral thinking is that our duties are grounded second-personally, in the respect owed directly to those involved. Stephen Darwall, among others, has argued that eudaimonist virtue ethics cannot satisfactorily account for these second personal reasons so deeply embedded in our moral practices. I try to show that this is false, that eudaimonism can satisfactorily allow for deep second-personal reasons, so long as we are clear on the role that flourishing plays in such a theory—not typically as being a reason for anything itself, but as a fundamental explanation for why other things give rise to the reasons they do.

Philosophy of Religion

"Faith as Intention to Believe" (draft available) - The idea that religious faith is a distinctive sort of attitude has received increased attention in recent years. Part of what makes religious faith puzzling is the way that it seems to involve both practical and theoretical commitments and attitudes. How can these be unified, and which, if either, is more fundamental? My suggestion is that faith is an intention to believe. Since a belief is in part constituted by various dispositions (to report when asked, to use as a premise in practical reasoning, to feel conviction, etc.), having faith on this view involves intending to have the various dispositions which are at least in part constitutive of having belief, with the goal of thereby having it. I argue that this approach better unifies and more fruitfully illuminates the cognitive and conative aspects of faith.

"In Defense of Orthodox Panentheism" (short draft available) - "Panentheism", in its broadest sense, refers to a particular way of viewing the relation between God and the world, one which sees God as fully present within, while still yet transcending, the world. It aims to be a sort of middle ground between two alternative conceptions. On the one hand, there is the pantheistic God, which is said to be identical to the world. On the other, there is a theistic conception of God as existing alongside the world he created, a person whose primary relation to the world is that of maker or designer (though he may more or less regularly intervene in its workings). In contrast to the former, the panentheist insists upon a radical ontological difference between God and the world. In contrast to the latter, that God is both fully "in" the world, and the world

fully “in” God. Of course, much depends on how we understand this idea that God is “in” the world, and vice versa. In this paper I discuss, and hopefully show the appeal of, one particular way of spelling out this idea which developed in the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition.