

Research Portfolio

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Research Statement

I work primarily in moral, social, and political philosophy, with special emphasis on bioethics, animal ethics, and environmental ethics.

One of my current projects in this area is on animals and climate change. Specifically, in my paper “Animals and climate change” (*Philosophy and Climate Change*), I argue that animals are central to climate change in two ways. First, farmed animals are a leading cause of climate change, and therefore we should center resistance to industrial animal agriculture in our efforts to mitigate climate change. Second, climate change will be a leading cause of wild animals suffering, and therefore we should center consideration of wild animals in our efforts to adapt to climate change. Since this topic is both complex and neglected, I am also expanding this material into a book for either Polity or OUP.

Another, related project in this area is on food, animals, and the environment. For example, I am currently working with Christopher Schlottmann on a book titled *Food, Animals, and the Environment: An ethical approach* (Routledge). In this book we examine the animal welfare, public health, and environmental impacts of different food systems as well as the ethical questions these impacts raise for food production, consumption, activism, and advocacy. I am also working with Jennifer Jacquet and Max Elder on a paper that argues against aquaculture and with Dale Jamieson on a paper that argues in favor of cultured meat.

I am working on several other papers related to activism as well. For example, in my paper “Multi-issue food activism” (*The Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics*), I discuss the costs and benefits of promoting unity, solidarity, and mutual understanding across food movements. In a paper Peter Singer and I are writing called “Activism” (*Critical Terms for Animal Studies*), we discuss the costs and benefits of evidence-based activism. And, in a paper that L.A. Paul and I are writing called “Effective Altruism and Transformative Values” (*Philosophical Perspectives on Effective Altruism*), we discuss how effective altruists should make decisions that will change who they are and what they care about.

Finally, I am also working on several papers related to sentience, agency, and moral status. For example, in my paper “The Moral Problem of Other Minds,” I examine how we should treat individuals in cases of uncertainty about whether or not they are sentient, on the assumption that sentience is necessary and sufficient for moral status. And, in my paper “Agency and Moral Status” (*The Journal of Moral Philosophy*), I make a distinction between “perceptual agency” and “propositional agency,” I argue that humans and nonhumans alike often act as perceptual agents, and I argue that insofar as we exercise the same kind of agency, we have the same kind of moral status.

Book: Animals and Climate Change

I am currently starting work on a book titled *Animals and Climate Change*, which I will publish with either Polity or OUP (I currently have an offer from Polity). This book argues that animals are central to climate change, and so we need to center them in our response to climate change.

The standard narrative about climate change is that since humans are changing the climate and will suffer as a result, we have a moral duty to mitigate and adapt to climate change as much as we can. However, this narrative is incomplete, since nonhuman animals are central to climate change as well, both as causes and as victims. Farmed animals are a leading contributor to climate change, and climate change will be a leading contributor to wild animal suffering. Thus, we need to center farmed animals and wild animals much more in our efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

I begin by discussing farmed animals and climate change. Why are farmed animals a leading contributor to climate change? Industrial animal agriculture is responsible for an estimated 9 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, 37 percent of global methane emissions, and 65 percent of global nitrous oxide emissions. All told, this industry is responsible for anywhere from 18-51 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Needless to say, this contribution is massive, and it will only increase as our population rises and developing nations adopt industrial animal agricultural standards.

I argue that in light of these impacts, we should center abolition of industrial animal agriculture in our efforts to mitigate climate change. So far, environmentalists have resisted this idea, for pragmatic as well as principled reasons. For example, some people worry that a focus on industrial animal agriculture will alienate our intended audience, and will also interfere with food sovereignty in developing nations. But while these are important concerns, they are not reason to tolerate the status quo. Instead, they are reason to resist the status quo ethically and effectively, which, I argue, we can do.

I then discuss wild animals and climate change. Why will climate change be a leading contributor to wild animal suffering? Climate change will radically alter global ecosystems, bringing about mass extinction and migration. Quadrillions, if not quintillions, of animals will suffer as a result. However, it is difficult to say what the overall effects of climate change will be for wild animals, as well as what, if anything, we should do about these effects. Indeed, I argue, the problem of climate change and wild animal suffering sits at the intersection of some of the hardest problems that we face in science and philosophy, and therefore it is not only especially important but also especially daunting.

I survey the questions that we have to ask in order to clarify our thinking about this issue. The questions that we have to ask include: How will climate change affect biodiversity, and does biodiversity have intrinsic moral value? Do wild animals have good or bad lives overall, and is it better if more or fewer of them exist? Are harms and benefits equally important, or are harms more important than benefits? Can we effectively intervene in wild animal suffering, and if so, are we morally required to do so? More generally, what can we learn from this discussion about the nature of moral responsibility, risk and uncertainty, and legal and political status?

I argue that we morally ought to help wild animals adapt to climate change. How exactly we should do so is hard to say. However, we can draw two conclusions now. First, we cannot wait for consensus about these issues in order to take action. We may never achieve consensus about these issues, yet the fact remains that climate change will have a massive impact on wild animals that we need to address. Second, there are at least two steps that we can take to prepare for assisting wild animals. First, we can research interventions in wild animal suffering, so that we know what to do when the time comes. Second, we can extend political status to wild animals so that we are able to act when the time comes.

Book: Food, Animals, and the Environment

Chris Schlottmann and I are currently finishing work on a book titled *Food, Animals, and the Environment: An Ethical Approach* (Routledge, forthcoming). This book explores the impacts of industrial and non-industrial food systems for animal welfare, public health, and the environment, as well as the moral questions that these impacts raise for food production, consumption, activism, and advocacy.

We begin, in Chapters 1 and 2, by introducing basic descriptive concepts that will be relevant to this book including natural, local, organic, industrial, the Anthropocene, wilderness, and domestication. We also provide a basic review of the nature of agriculture and food production, discussing how agriculture and food production pose special challenges for moral and political philosophy by virtue of being characterized by different kinds of impact on different human and nonhuman populations.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we introduce the basic normative concepts that will be relevant to this book. We begin by presenting several major moral theories and discussing how these theories apply to our use of animals in food. Next, we discuss the special moral challenges that arise in global collective action problems like climate change, and we explore the difference between individual, collective, and corporate responsibility for the harms that we cause through our consumption.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we examine the impacts of industrial agriculture. We begin by discussing environmental impacts, focusing on conversion ratios, greenhouse gasses, and multi-factor environmental assessment. We then discuss the public health impacts, focusing on malnutrition and global pandemics. Next, we discuss the impacts on workers, including low pay, dangerous work, and limited visibility. Finally, we discuss the impacts on nonhuman animals in the meat and dairy industry.

In Chapters 7 and 8, we explore alternatives to industrial agriculture. We begin by discussing concerns about methane emissions in free range food systems, the carbon footprint of local food systems, the toxicity of organic food systems, land use change due to heritage food systems, and the possibility of feeding a rising population through non-industrial methods more generally. The aim of these chapters is to provide a balanced perspective on the strengths and limitations of alternative food systems.

In Chapters 9 and 10, we examine the ethics of food production and consumption. We begin by discussing technical solutions like GMOs, biotechnology, in-vitro meat, vertical farming, and market-based systems. We then discuss the ethics of what we eat, considering diets based on the moral status of what we eat (e.g., conscientious omnivorism, pescetarianism, demi-vegetarianism, vegetarianism, veganism, fruitarianism) as well as other kinds of considerations (e.g., locavorism, freeganism, fair/direct trade).

Finally, in Chapters 11 and 12, we examine the ethics of food activism and advocacy. We begin by discussing whether individual, consumer-based approaches to food activism are effective. We also discuss ethical issues that arise for non-consumer-driven approaches to food activism. This includes debates between abolition vs. regulation, multi-issue vs. single-issue activism, and legal vs. illegal activism. We end with a discussion about navigating conflicts among humans, nonhumans, and the environment.

Published, Forthcoming, and Under Review

Activism (with Peter Singer)

Critical Terms for Animal Studies (Chicago University Press, forthcoming)

In this paper we discuss the past, present, and future of animal activism and advocacy. For decades, animal activists have debated approaches such as abolition vs. regulation, revolution vs. reform, legal vs. illegal activism, and more. More recently, effective altruists have started to rigorously assess the costs and benefits of different approaches. We know, for example, that donations in support of farm animals are more likely to be cost-effective than donations in support of animal shelters, all else equal. The question now is whether and to what degree we can extend these assessments to other, more long-term and systemic approaches to reducing animal suffering. We consider the challenges and opportunities inherent in these efforts and conclude with several provisional recommendations.

Animals and Climate Change

Philosophy and Climate Change (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)

I argue that animals are central to climate change, since farmed animals are a leading cause of climate change and climate change will be a leading cause of wild animal suffering. In these chapter I defend these claims and examine their implications. I start by arguing that industrial animal agriculture is responsible for 18-51% of global GHG emissions, and therefore we need to center abolition of industrial animal agriculture in our efforts to mitigate climate change. I then argue that climate change will have a pervasive impact on wild animal populations, and therefore we need to center consideration of wild animals in our efforts to adapt to climate change. I close by discussing the issues in science and philosophy that we need to address to make further progress on these issues.

Effective Altruism and Transformative Values (with L.A. Paul)

Philosophical Perspectives on Effective Altruism (Oxford University Press, contract pending)

Effective altruists attempt to use evidence and reason to do the most good that they can. However, many of our choices involve transformative experience, i.e. they affect our values in ways that we cannot fully anticipate. This limits our ability to make informed, rational decisions about long-term plans. In this chapter, we discuss the challenges and opportunities that decisions involving transformative experience pose for effective altruists. For example, how should I think about what career to pursue, given that this choice will affect who I am as a person? And, how should we think about how to engage with the public, given that these choices will affect who we are as a movement? We consider several possible answers to these questions, and we indicate where we think this discussion should head next.

Multi-Issue Food Activism

The Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)

Food activism sits at the intersection of many different social movements. For example, you might engage in food activism because you want to combat racism, sexism, classism, and more. The pluralistic nature of food activism has benefits as well as costs: It allows us to build alliances, but it can also lead to conflict. This article examines the debate between multi-issue food activism, which spans multiple movements and addresses multiple issues, and single-issue food activism, which does not. I begin by reviewing the kinds of connections across issues that are relevant here. I then present and evaluate two arguments for multi-issue food activism – one principled and one pragmatic – and three approaches to multi-issue food activism – unity, solidarity, and mutual understanding. Finally, I close with a few preliminary conclusions about how we can do food activism in a thoughtful way.

Wildness and Civilization (with Maryse Mitchell-Brody)

Animaladies (forthcoming, pending contract and final review)

In this article we argue that there is a tension between maintaining order and respecting difference that we see especially clearly in the case of “disorderly” human and nonhuman animals. In the past, political actors have responded to this tension by locking “disorderly” individuals away. We argue that this response is unjust, and we examine the implications for political philosophy. Specifically, it is an open question whether liberal theories of justice, which emphasize the value of stability as well as the value of toleration, have the resources to accommodate the sheer variety of experience we now see among beings who seem to merit political inclusion. We survey possible answers, and we claim that any adequate answer will likely involve either relaxing our conception of the circumstances of justice or admitting that we were never in the circumstances of justice in the first place.

Agency and Moral Status

Journal of Moral Philosophy (2017)

According to our traditional conception of agency, most human beings are agents and most, if not all, nonhuman animals are not. However, recent developments in philosophy and psychology have made it clear that we need more than one conception of agency, since human and nonhuman animals are capable of thinking and acting in more than one kind of way. In this paper, I make a distinction between perceptual and propositional agency, and I argue that many nonhuman animals are perceptual agents and that many human beings are both kinds of agent. I then argue that, insofar as human and nonhuman animals exercise the same kind of agency, they have the same kind of moral status, and I explore some of the moral implications of this idea.

Bivalves Are Better (with Jennifer Jacquet and Max Elder)

Solutions (2017)

The domestication of aquatic species is the fastest and most poorly thought out expansion of domesticated animals to ever occur. Many people are promoting aquaculture as replacing or at least supplementing wild, capture fisheries. A growing body of literature has assessed ecological concerns about aquaculture. Less consideration has been given to food security or animal welfare concerns. We argue that, if we are to culture aquatic animals (and that debate should remain open), we must include food security and animal welfare considerations in our deliberations so that we do not make the same mistakes as we did with terrestrial animals. We also argue that if our aim is to culture aquatic animals while minimizing negative ecological, food security, and animal welfare consequences, bivalves (e.g., oysters, mussels, clams and scallops) appear to be the species group with the most promise.

The Just Soul

The Journal of Value Inquiry (2015)

Many philosophers think that, if your “day self” and “night self” are physically, psychologically, and narratively continuous with each other, then they are the same unit of moral concern. But I argue that your day self and night self can share all of these relations and still be different units of moral concern, on the grounds that they can share all of these relations and still be in the circumstances of justice. I then argue that this conception of the scope of morality has revisionary, but ultimately plausible, implications for the morality of self-binding. For example, it implies that your day self and night self have a prima facie duty not to coerce or physically restrain each other in order to get what they want. But it also implies that they are morally permitted to coerce and physically restrain each other much more often, and with respect to many more issues, than, say, you and your friend are.

Multiplicity, Self-Narrative, and Akrasia

Philosophical Psychology (2015)

In this paper I present a new account of akrasia based on the idea that human psychology and self-narrativity are more complex and layered than we have traditionally thought. I begin by arguing that, if we have at least some different beliefs, desires, preferences, etc. in different situations, then we can rationally do what we think, at the time of action, is best for, or from the standpoint of, part of me while acting contrary to what we think, at the time of action, is best for, or from the more comprehensive standpoint of, me. I then argue that many of us do, in fact, think and act this way in everyday life, and that this kind of action satisfies all the criteria for akrasia. Finally, I briefly argue that, on my account of akrasia, akratic actions are not necessarily irrational or blameworthy, though they often will be.

Necessary Conditions for Morally Responsible Animal Research (with David DeGrazia)

Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics (2015)

Animal research raises moral questions for several reasons. Nearly all animal research harms its subjects, animal subjects almost never benefit directly from their involvement in research, and animal subjects cannot give informed consent to their involvement in research. In this paper, we present three necessary conditions for ethical animal research that, we think, people on both sides of this debate can accept. Specifically, we argue that animal research is morally permissible only if it satisfies (a) an expectation of net benefit condition, (b) a worthwhile life condition, and (c) a no unnecessary harm / qualified basic needs condition. We then claim that, whether or not these necessary conditions are jointly sufficient, many animal experiments fail to satisfy them and are therefore morally wrong.

Utilitarianism, Multiplicity, and Liberalism

Utilitas (2015)

In this paper I argue that utilitarianism requires us to tolerate intrapersonal disagreement for the same reasons that it requires us to tolerate interpersonal disagreement. I begin by arguing that multiplicity has many of the same costs and benefits as multiculturalism: it causes conflict, but it also allows us to perform experiments in living, adopt a division of labor, compartmentalize harm, and learn from ourselves. I then argue that utilitarianism requires us to adopt a “liberal system of individual self-government,” according to which we should not try to impose a unified set of beliefs and values on ourselves. Finally, I argue that we should apply this policy of liberal toleration to intrapersonal disagreement about utilitarianism too: if we want to maximize utility, then we should tolerate inner conflict not only about how to maximize utility but also about whether we should be trying to do so.

The Ethics of Incest

Philosophy in the Contemporary World (2006)

In this paper I challenge two common arguments against incest: the genetics argument (that incest is immoral because it might lead to the conception of a genetically deformed child), and the family argument (that incest is immoral because it undermines the family, the emotional center for the individual). These arguments, I claim, commit us to condemning not only incest, but also a wide range of behaviors that we currently permit. I thus present the reader with a dilemma: We must either accept certain forms of incest in order to maintain these other moral judgments or reject these judgments in order to maintain our condemnation of incest. The reader is free to decide which option is preferable, but I suggest that the former is a less radical shift in our moral system as a whole.

A Critique of the Kantian Theory of Indirect Duties to Animals

Animal Liberation Philosophy & Policy (2005)

Kant famously argues that we have no direct moral duties to animals; instead, we have only indirect duties to animals insofar as our treatment of them affects human beings. In this paper, I argue that Kantian ethics implies that we have direct moral duties to animals after all. I begin by arguing that the humanity formula of the categorical imperative, as normally interpreted, poses a problem: if rationality but not animality is an end in itself, then humans as well as nonhumans have only indirect moral status with respect to many of our activities. I then argue that we can solve this problem only by allowing that rationality as well as animality is an end in itself, from which it follows that humans as well as nonhumans have direct moral status. The upshot is that Kantian ethics, in order to protect the vulnerabilities of humans, must protect the vulnerabilities of nonhumans as well.

The Discounting Defense of Animal Research

Revise & Resubmit, *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*

In this paper, I critique a defense of animal research recently proposed by Baruch Brody. According to what I call the discounting defense of animal research, our policy of favoring members of our own species is like our policy of favoring members of our own family, nation, and generation: It is not a morally impermissible case of discrimination but rather a morally permissible case of discounting. I argue, however, that none of the standard justifications for discounting supports favoring members of our own species in research. Indeed, if anything, these justifications support favoring members of other species in certain respects, especially given our history and legacy of harming nonhumans in research. The upshot is that we have strong prima facie reason to think that our preferential treatment of humans over nonhumans in research counts as discrimination rather than discounting.

The Self as a Center of Psychological Gravity

Revise & Resubmit, *Philosophical Papers*

In this paper I develop and defend a theory of the self that combines the simplicity of antirealism and the explanatory power of realism. I begin by critiquing two strategies that antirealists have used to achieve this goal. These strategies culminate in Dennetts analogy with centers of gravity, the potential of which is only partially realized, I argue, in Dennetts conception of the self as a center of narrative gravity. I then argue that we can fully realize the potential of this analogy, as well as vindicate the idea that the self is simple as well as explanatorily useful, if we say that the self is a center of psychological gravity, i.e., an abstract, simple set of psychological dispositions around which our actual, fluctuating psychological dispositions are evenly distributed, which we posit and aim to describe in our self-narratives for purposes of everyday psychological explanation, prediction, and control.

The Moral Problem of Other Minds

I ask how we should treat other beings in cases of uncertainty about whether or not they are sentient (on the assumption that sentience is necessary and sufficient for moral status). I evaluate three options: (1) an incautious principle that permits us to treat other beings as non-sentient, (2) a precautionary principle that requires us to treat other beings as sentient, and (3) an expected value principle that requires us to multiply our credence that other beings are sentient by the amount of sentience that they would have if they were. I then draw three conclusions. First, the precautionary and expected value principles are more plausible than the incautious principle. Second, if we accept a precautionary or expected value principle, then we morally ought to treat many beings as having at least partial moral status. Third, if we morally ought to treat many beings as having at least partial moral status, then morality involves more cluelessness and demandingness than we might have thought.

Works In Progress

Animals and Shared Agency

In this paper I argue that nonhumans can share agency in the same kind of way that humans can. I begin by making a distinction between “propositional agency,” which only humans have, and “perceptual agency,” which humans and nonhumans share. I then argue that perceptual agency allows for the same kind of structure that propositional agency does, and therefore, on a widely accepted account of shared agency, we can share both kinds of agency. For instance, if you and I walk together because we each intend to walk with the other, then we count as a shared propositional agent during our walk. Similarly, I argue, if my dog and I walk together because we each experience the other as to-be-walked-with, then we count as a shared perceptual agent during our walk. Finally, I argue that if nonhumans can share agency, then they can also share certain moral and political rights.

Broadening Bioethics (with Dale Jamieson)

In this paper we discuss the past, present, and future of bioethics. Bioethics has a fractured history: some philosophers have associated it primarily with health ethics and others have associated it primarily with environmental ethics. More recently, these lines have blurred, in part because people are starting to combine these conceptions of bioethics and in part because questions about health and the environment are so deeply intertwined. We discuss several issues where considerations of health and the environment play a central role. Some of these issues, like the ethics of food, have received a lot of attention in bioethics. Others, like the ethics of war, have not. We claim that, if we want to make progress in bioethics, then we must follow these problems where they lead, rather than attempt to impose upon them our favored categories of thought.

The Future of Meat (with Dale Jamieson)

In this paper we examine several of the moral and political questions raised by new kinds of meat. We begin by discussing the ways in which products like processed meat, faux meat, and in vitro meat disrupt the traditional conceptual categories that we have for talking about the ethics of what we eat. We then consider the benefits of these new kinds of meat, as well as the moral, social, and political obstacles in the way of widespread adoption. For example, whether or not we achieve widespread adoption of in vitro meat will depend on whether or not we can pit traditionally unified economic interests within the meat industry against each other. Finally, we consider several ways of overcoming these obstacles, and we argue that we must be very careful if we want to avoid the kinds of problems that other, similar technological innovations such as GMOs have become mired in.

A New, An Environmental Ethic

Many environmental ethicists think that our current, individualistic morality is hopeless in the face of global moral and political problems like climate change, and they argue that we should therefore replace it with a new, collectivist morality. I am inclined to agree with this idea. However, I also think that this call for a new morality is much more radical than we might have thought. In this paper, I argue that, if we want a new morality, then we have two options. First, we can accept an *esoteric* morality. That is, we can persuade others to accept a moral theory that we believe is false. Second, we can accept an *absurd* morality. That is, we can take a “leap of faith” and accept a moral theory despite believing that this theory is false. I consider the strengths and limitations of each approach and argue that they are well worth exploring all things considered, in light of the severity of our situation.

Dissertation Summary

In my dissertation, *The Personal Is Political*, I argue that Plato was right that we should use political morality as a model for personal morality. Many people have multiple personalities in a non-pathological sense (i.e., they have at least some different beliefs, desires, aims, and so on in different situations), and some of these personalities are full moral agents. Thus, many people are like states: they are *communities* of moral agents who share resources and a common fate. I then pursue the analogy with the state with respect to issues such as integrity, justice, and responsibility.

First, in Chapter 1, “The Subject As Multiplicity,” I apply this analogy to the question of psychological self-integration. I begin by considering three ways in which a person can be “fragmented”: we can have multiple personas, we can have multiple personalities (in the non-pathological sense), and we can have multiple self-narratives. I then argue fragmentation has many of the same costs and benefits for people that it has for groups of people: it can cause disagreement and conflict, but it also allows us to perform experiments in living, adopt a division of labor, compartmentalize harm, and learn from each other. Thus, I argue, many of us should try to fragment ourselves in all three of these ways.

Next, in Chapter 2, “Is Self-Binding Morally Wrong?,” I apply the analogy with the state to the question of justice. Specifically, I argue that, if a person has multiple personalities (in the non-pathological sense), then these personalities are not morally permitted to bind each other whenever they want. Instead, they have a duty to jointly commit to a fair set of laws and a right to bind each other only insofar as they have to, in order to enforce these laws. Thus, I argue, a person with multiple personalities has a “just soul” only insofar as these personalities jointly commit to a fair set of laws, and this person is “sovereign,” i.e., they have a right to live the way they want, only insofar as they have a just soul.

Finally, in Chapter 3, “Personal Responsibility,” I apply the analogy with the state to the question of responsibility. Specifically, I argue that, if a person has multiple personalities (in the non-pathological sense), then these personalities are not praise- or blameworthy for what each other does. Instead, they are, at best, complicit in what each other does, indirectly responsible for what each other does, criticizable in light of what each other does, and liable for what each other does. I then argue that this theory of personal responsibility has revisionary but ultimately plausible moral implications. Specifically, it implies that, while we are not responsible for *all* of our past actions in *all* of these ways, we are still responsible for *most* of our past actions in *most* of these ways.

The upshot is that we can justify many of our intuitions about the difference between intrapersonal and interpersonal morality, while at the same time accepting that there is no difference in kind between these two levels of morality. Granted, we might not be able to justify *all* of our intuitions about intrapersonal morality on this picture, e.g., we cannot justify the idea that we should try to be fully psychologically unified, that we can permissibly bind all of our future selves, or that we are praise- or blameworthy for all of our actions. But these intuitions are not, on reflection, plausible anyway. Thus, I argue, my conception of intrapersonal morality is not only simpler than other, more traditional conceptions, but more plausible as well.