Research statement

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My research program is centred around a belief in the ethical significance of the passage of time. Our lives are situated between the past and the future, extended in time, and constrained by time, and my work aims to advance our philosophical understanding of the ways in which these features affect what is valuable and what we have reasons to do. Much of this research lies within four areas of ethics: preserving the valuable, well-being, the future of humanity, and the ethics of technology. But I also maintain side interests and have published articles in epistemology, political philosophy, and the history of philosophy.

PRESERVING THE VALUABLE. My dissertation, "Preserving the Valuable", is concerned with the significance of the past. It engages with the idea that we have a distinctive moral reason to preserve certain valuable things even when a superior replacement is available. For example, we seem to have a reason to preserve the iconic Golden Gate Bridge—because it already exists and has special, non-instrumental value—even if we could build an even more impressive bridge in its place. G. A. Cohen dubbed this view 'conservatism about value'. In my dissertation, I offer a systematic discussion of this position and its implications, traversing normative ethics, metaethics, and bioethics. This project currently spans four self-standing papers and is near completion.

Two of these papers are already under review. In **"The Shape of History"** (R&R at *Philosophy & Public Affairs*), I discuss a new puzzle about value and time. Consider two ways in which the condition of humanity could change over time. In the first, our history starts with hardship and ends with flourishing. In the second, the opposite happens. These scenarios are permutations of each other—in the sense that for every period of flourishing in one course of history, there is exactly one such period in the other, and so on—which suggests that they are equally good. However, many people have the intuition that the improving history is better than the deteriorating one. I argue that we cannot provide a compelling rationale for this judgment by extending any of the popular answers to the structurally similar puzzle about the shape of a life. I then develop a novel view rooted in conservatism about value.

In **"Conservatism about Prudential Value"**, I propose that we should expand the scope of conservatism about value. Discussions of this view—by G. A. Cohen, Samuel Scheffler, Johann Frick, and Jacob Nebel—have focused on things which are *good simpliciter*, such as traditions and artworks. Drawing on a range of real-life and fictional cases, I argue that we also have a distinctive moral reason to conserve certain *prudential goods*, such as loving relationships and important personal projects, even when a superior replacement is available. I then show that this view illuminates several old and new puzzles about how to navigate different stages of life, such as how to balance exploration and commitment in youth, whether the reluctance to start new engagements in old age is justified, and how long we should wait before moving on from a loss.

Overall, my dissertation has several important upshots. On the practical side, it implies that, because our existence is temporally situated, we cannot start a new life or society whenever we please. Existing cultural artefacts, loving relationships, and important projects warrant a kind of loyalty, which gives us a reason to conserve them. Moreover, on the theoretical side, my dissertation gives us an insight into the normative status of our loving relationships and certain personal projects. We should be concerned with the survival and condition of these things above and beyond the contribution they make to our well-being, and our reasons to preserve them are moral and agent-neutral, just like our reasons to preserve the Grand Canyon or the Mona Lisa.

WELL-BEING. The second strand of my research concerns the nature of well-being. In **"Wasted Potential"** (*Philosophy & Public Affairs*, forthcoming), I discuss the significance of modal features in this context. According to the orthodox view, the goodness of a life depends exclusively on the things that have actually happened within it, such as its pleasures and pains, the satisfaction of its subject's preferences, or the presence of objective goods and bads. I challenge this view and argue that it also matters what could have happened but didn't. On my view, how good a life is for someone is determined *jointly* by their level of well-being and by the degree to which they realize their potential. I then show that this view helps us resolve three ethical puzzles concerning the standards for a life worth living for animals, the significance of a life's shape, and the badness of death.

In the coming years, I plan to turn my attention to the significance of temporal features for well-being. Many people assume that whether and how an event contributes to a person's well-being does not depend on when in their life it occurs. I am sceptical of this claim and intend to address three questions. First, are there distinctive goods (or bads) of childhood and old age? Second, do goods like pleasant experiences and loving relationships make different contributions to well-being depending on whether they occur in one's childhood, midlife, or old age? Third, is it better if ingredients of well-being are evenly distributed in one's life rather than concentrated in one stage?

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY. While my dissertation focuses on the ethical significance of the past, another strand of my research concerns issues surrounding the future of humanity. Thus far, my work in this area has been in population axiology, which is the study of conditions under which one future is better than another, when they might differ in the numbers, quality of life, and identities of people. In **"On Parfit's Wide Dual Person-Affecting Principle"** (*The Philosophical Quarterly*, 2020), I argue that Derek Parfit's last attempt to spell out those conditions implies what he himself regarded as a 'repugnant conclusion': that for any state of affairs in which many people have excellent lives, there is a better state of affairs in which more people exist but everyone has just a barely good life. Somewhat ironically, my work in this area also includes a contribution to a philosophers' brief **"What Should We Agree on about the Repugnant Conclusion?"** (*Utilitas*, 2021), in which we contend that the repugnant conclusion is not deserving of its name and that avoiding it should no longer be the central goal driving population ethics research.

Going forward, I plan to extend my work in this area beyond axiology. On the foundational side, I am interested in writing about the nature of our reasons to ensure that humanity is not replaced by another intelligent species or otherwise becomes extinct. On the more practical side, I would like to contribute to the growing literature on the 'longtermist' view that the most important feature of our actions today is their impact on the far future. Many of the ideas developed in my dissertation will be useful in this context. While Samuel Scheffler and Johann Frick have already observed, in passing, that we have a conservative reason to want humanity to continue into the future, their discussions leave open many questions, such as what exactly we have reasons to do, given that end, and how strong these reasons are. The literature on longtermism, on the other hand, suffers from a predominantly formal and consequentialist orientation, whereas I think that similar conclusions about the overwhelming importance of the far future can be reached via premises more amenable to non-consequentialists.

ETHICS OF TECHNOLOGY. While our lives are currently temporally constrained, this might change soon. Recent progress in geroscience holds the promise of significantly slowing down or even reversing ageing and age-related diseases, and thus increasing our lifespans and healthspans. I'm interested in three ethical issues this raises. The first is whether the length of life should be a matter of distributive justice, in the same way that wealth or health are. In **"Healthspan Extension, Completeness of Life, and Justice**" (*Bioethics*, forthcoming), I argue that it should be, and offer

a justice-based argument in favour of developing life extension technology and making it unconditionally available. The second issue is whether our relationships, projects, and collective practices would lose their value if our lives were much longer, as Bernard Williams, Samuel Scheffler, and Martha Nussbaum have suggested; I intend to defend the view that they wouldn't. The third issue is whether the possibility of greatly extending our lives would force us to embrace 'prudential longtermism': the idea that, *prudentially*, the most important feature of your actions today is their impact on your far future and the likelihood of living a very long life.

My other planned project in the ethics of technology concerns the right to privacy. I want to examine whether we can violate a person's right to privacy by using information they have consensually disclosed to infer something sensitive about them—which is something that corporations and states often do, using increasingly complex and reliable predictive algorithms.

OTHER RESEARCH INTERESTS. While my primary research interests lie in ethics and political philosophy, I consider myself a philosophical generalist and maintain strong side-interests in epistemology and the history of philosophy.

In epistemology, my work has two strands. The first concerns suspension of judgment and inquiry. My core ideas on this topic are developed in **"Friedman on Suspended Judgment"** (*Synthese*, 2020), where I challenge Jane Friedman's influential view that suspension of judgment is a sui generis attitude and that it plays a fundamental role in inquiry. Instead, I argue, suspension of judgment is best understood as a second-order attitude which is not necessary for inquiry.

The second concerns 'epistemic consequentialism', the view that epistemic normativity is about promoting epistemic value. This view has recently come under heavy criticism and I have begun work on a series of papers vindicating it. For example, in **"Junk, Numerosity, and the Demands of Epistemic Consequentialism"** (R&R at *Erkenntnis*), I respond to the challenge that this view is too demanding because it implies that we are required to believe 'junk' propositions (such as 'the Great Bear Lake is the largest lake entirely in Canada') and to have an enormous number of true beliefs. I argue that we avoid these implications if we recognize that, like ethical value, epistemic value has a *temporal dimension*: the final value of a true belief depends partially on how long it is retained by the agent.

In the history of philosophy, my first publication concerns Arthur Schopenhauer's ethical theory. In **"Schopenhauer on Suicide and Negation of the Will"** (*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2021), I scrutinise his heavily criticized argument against suicide and argue that it is consistent with his wider metaphysical and ethical system. At some point, I would like to address two puzzling issues uncovered in that paper: whether Schopenhauer is allowed to say that never having been born is better for a person than existing and attaining a 'state of will-lessness', and whether his view even makes room for 'goodness for', as opposed to 'goodness simpliciter'.