

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Christopher L. Holland, Saint Louis University

I primarily work in *ethics* and *philosophy of religion*.

My research in **ethics** centers on theories of well-being and their impact. A theory of well-being is a theory of what is good *for* individuals, in other words, a theory of self-interest. Well-being is worth studying in its own right, but it also plays a pivotal role in normative ethics, theories of the good life, and philosophical discussions of the meaning of life. I aim to understand a broad range of perspectives on human well-being. I am an active member of a diverse, international group of early-career researchers (known as the [Well-Being Working Group](#)) who approach the philosophy of well-being from a broad range of perspectives and meet weekly to discuss drafts of our own work or the published work of others. My work explores the distinction between subjective and objective theories of well-being, as well as the relationship between theories of well-being and theories of the good life. In future research, I aim to apply my expertise in well-being to issues in applied ethics—especially the effects of emerging technologies, including recent advances in artificial intelligence, on human well-being.

My current project is a subjective theory of well-being that identifies faring well with self-fulfillment and pleasure. This view contrasts with the family of (broadly) Aristotelian theories—often called eudaimonism or perfectionism—that tie well-being to flourishing as the *kind* of thing one is. My theory, on the other hand, focuses on the flourishing of one's *individual* or *particular* nature. I further argue that nature-fulfillment theories, even self-fulfillment ones, cannot satisfactorily explain the goodness of pleasure or badness of pain (see my [writing sample](#) for a defense of this claim). This leads me to identify well-being with self-fulfillment and pleasure, rather than self-fulfillment alone.

I also work on the relationship between theories of well-being and theories of the good life. Many philosophers, especially virtue ethicists, lump the two together, but they are at least conceptually distinct. Consider a wealthy antebellum slave owner who enjoys a rich home and social life but cares little about the harsh working conditions of their slaves.

Pretheoretically, this looks like a case in which one increases their well-being at a cost to the overall goodness of their life—my work on well-being aims to preserve this intuition. If I want to live a good life—a life that is choice-worthy on the whole—I will likely have to make sacrifices to my own well-being.

Finally, I have explored the effects of emerging technologies on human well-being in my [Computer Ethics](#) course. The course addresses a broad range of ethical issues related to digital technologies, but I am most interested in the future of automation. For example, tech companies such as OpenAI are interested in producing “highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work” ([OpenAI Charter](#)). In future research, I aim to assess the desirability of this outcome through the lens of various well-being theories.

My research in **philosophy of religion** is divided between issues in Christian philosophical theology and issues in theism, broadly construed. Most Christian philosophers working on well-being advance objective theories, but my dissertation, “Well-being and Christian Theism,” proposes a subjective theory. Objective theories tend to alienate welfare subjects from their own good. I argue that my theory better addresses alienation concerns without compromising Christian doctrinal claims—most notably, that human persons are best off in union with God. (For more details, see my [dissertation summary](#) and [chapter 1 draft](#).) I also work on more traditional problems in philosophy of religion. Here, my work tends to focus on the problem of evil and the coherence of theism.